



Dharma Rakshamani K. Balasubramania Iyer (1892-1970) was the eldest son of V. Krishnaswamy Iyer (former Judge of Madras High Court). He translated from Sanskrit the *Yaksha Prasna* of Mahabharata into English for the series of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan publications.

He was a great scholar in Sanskrit and in Tamil and was a learned exponent of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* and *Ramayana* etc.

He was awarded the title of *Dharma Rakshamani* by His Holiness the Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti in 1933. He was awarded the *Padma Bhushan* by the President of India in 1967.

He was associated with the Madras Sanskrit College, Venkataramana Ayurvedic College, the Vivekananda College and A.M. Jain College. He was President of the Sanskrit Academy, Vice-President of the Music Academy and President of the Veda Dharma Patasala of Kumbakonam.

He was a member of Madras University, and the Editor of *Kamakoti Pradeepam* and the Journal of Oriental Research. He published in English and Tamil *Vivaha Manthrarthangal* and *Upanayanam Manthrarthangal* and was a member of the Madras Legislative Council for 16 years from 1951.

He was Secretary of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Madras Kendra, from its inception and later became Vice-Chairman.

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

# Yaksha Prasna

K. BALASUBRAMANIA IYER



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-400 007

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# YAKSHA PRASNA

(with English Translation, Notes and Introduction)

K. BALASUBRAMANIA IYER



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## KULAPATI'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting itself to the utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the re-integration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions that allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social

relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

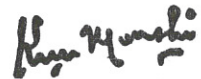
Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere". After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and

speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.



3rd October, 1951

(K. M. MUNSHI)



## FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to go-through the edition of Yaksha Prasna' brought out by Sri K. Balasubramanya Iyer. The author's faithful translation of the Sanskrit original; his learned introduction and useful notes combine to make the work valuable. I have no doubt that this effort on the part of the author will create a desire in the mind of the reader to go to the original *Mahabharata* in order to learn more lessons on Dharma and to enjoy the delights of poetry.

The 'Yaksha Prasna' episode appears in the Aranyaka Parva of the *Mahabharata* and shows that the *Mahabharata* is a treatise on Dharma in addition to being a work of literary art. It illustrates the Indian view that any work of art must be instructive and not merely entertaining. This is the significance of the statement that 'good poetry imparts advice in the manner of a wife'—*Kantasammitatayopadesa yuje*. The theme of the 'Yaksha Prasna' is the exposition of dharma in all its facets and this episode along with similar other episodes has contributed to the greatness of the *Mahabharata*. The Yaksha Prasna episode in particular is of considerable significance to a student of poetry. For it supports in great detail the new genre of literature viz., 'poetry of riddles' started in the Vedic texts. The Socratic method displayed in the episode is noteworthy as also the charm created by the unexpected questions raised and the dramatic answers given. Above all, there is the theme of Dharma running majestically and clearly in the entire episode to illustrate and explain the statement that 'victory and righteousness keep company.' "*Yato dharmah tato jayah*".

JAYA CHAMARAJA WADIYAR  
Maharaja of Mysore

The Palace, Mysore  
6th August 1963

## INTRODUCTION

The Mahabharata is the greatest book of wisdom that India has produced. Of it, it has been declared that

यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित् ।

‘Whatever is found here may be found elsewhere also. What is not here will be found nowhere else.’ The great sage Vyasa is the author of the Mahabharata and the benedictory words about the sage indicate its greatness. येन त्वया भारततैलपूर्यः प्रज्वालितो ज्ञानमयप्रदीपः ‘It is by you (Vyasa) that the great lamp of wisdom has been lighted, fed by the oil of the Bharata.’ The objective of the Maha Bharata is the elucidation of Dharma and the dominant Rasa of the Maha Bharata as a Kavya has been said to be the Santarasa.

The Bharatasavitri appearing at the end of the Mahabharata in the Swargarohana Parva consisting of four verses is said to be the essence of the fundamental teaching of the great epic. It is said: When recited every morning one obtains the fruit of the Bharata. The very first verse of the Bharatasavitri enunciates the prime importance of Dharma in the words of Vyasa himself—

ऊर्ध्वबाहुविरोम्येषः न च कश्चिच्छृणोति माम् ।  
धर्मद्वयं च कामश्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ॥

‘With raised hands,’ he says: ‘I cry aloud; nobody hears me. It is from Dharma that Artha and Kama arise. Why is Dharma not followed?’ The last verse of the Bharatasavitri runs as follows:



न जातु कामान्न भयान्न लोभात् धर्मं त्यजेत् जीवितस्यापि हेतोः ।  
नित्यो धर्मः सुखदुःखे त्वनित्ये जीवो नित्यः हेतुरस्य त्वनित्यः ॥

'Not out of passion or fear or avarice, not even for the sake of life should one abandon Dharma. Dharma is everlasting. Happiness and misery are transitory. The soul is eternal; That which embodies it, is not eternal.'

The word Dharma connotes many ideas. It is not adequate to translate it either as duty or virtue. Sometimes it is said to connote Religion. Often it is said to signify the same idea as the English word 'law'. Sometimes, when used in reference to things, it connotes their quality or property. In its abstract sense it means the same thing as the English word 'law'. But the English word 'law' is of wide significance ranging from a 'local law' to the law of the Universe. The word Dharma is one of the most ancient words. It is found in the Rig Veda Suktas. The texts in which the word occurs have been mentioned in the 'History of Dharmasastra' by MM. P. V. Kane. It is seen that in the Veda, the word is used in the neuter gender; for example in Purusha Sukta, तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् । In another place in the Rig Veda, the phrase सन्ता धर्माणि is used. It is not clear as to when exactly it began to be used in the masculine gender. But the significance of the word has been more or less the same. In the Mimamsa Sastra the word Dharma denotes the injunctions of the Veda-चोदनालक्षणार्थो धर्मः । Whatever is specially enjoined in the Veda-vakya as a command is said to constitute a Dharma. It also means traditional customs and conventions.

In the Apastamba Dharmasutra we find it used in that sense; धर्मज्ञसमयः प्रमाणं वेदाश्च । In the Smriti this when it is used with reference to the Varnas and Asramas, it conveys the duties of the four Varnas and Asramas. In that sense it is found in the compounds स्वधर्म, वर्गधर्म, जातिधर्म, आश्रम धर्म and वर्णाश्रमधर्म । The Maha Bharata gives a general definition of what constitutes Dharma. In the Karna Parva, Adhyaya 69, sloka 59, runs as follows:

धारणात् धर्म इत्याहुः धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः ।  
यो धारणसंयुक्तः स धर्म इति निश्चयः ॥

Here the word Dharma is derived from the root 'धृ' 'to bear, maintain or sustain'. Hence the word Dharma has this general significance of that which conduces to the stability of society, the maintenance of social order and the welfare of mankind. In this wide significance, it is mentioned as the first of the four Purusharthas, namely धर्मार्थकाममोक्ष ।

Again in the Santi Parva it is used in this wide sense, as that which produces the welfare of mankind.

प्रभवार्थाय भूतानां धर्मप्रवदनं कृतम् ।  
यत्स्यात् प्रभवसंयुक्तः स धर्म इति निश्चयः ॥

(Santi Parva Adhyaya 104, Sloka 1). From these references, we can well gather that Dharma has the basic underlying idea of denoting that which conduces to the stability of society and the maintenance of social order and well-being. In the Brihadaranyakopanishad when describing the creation and origin of the world, it is said as follows:

स नैव व्यभवत् । स ध्येयोरूपं अत्यसृजत धर्मम् ।  
तदेतत् क्षत्रस्य क्षत्रम् यद्वर्मः । तस्मात् परं नास्ति ।

अथो अबलो बलीयांस आशंसते धर्मेण ।

यथा राज्ञेवं यो वै स धर्मः । सत्यं वै तत् ॥

[Brah. 2 Adh. 1. K. 14]

After creating the four varanas, the mantra says, that Brahma did not feel absolutely certain that things would be alright. He therefore, over and above these, created Dharma which is the king over kings. That is, Dharma controls the Kshatriyas. There is nothing higher than Dharma. It is through this Dharma that a weak man hopes to control the stronger man as one does through the king; that Dharma is truth. Here Dharma has the same significance as the word 'Law'. It is on account of the reign of law that the stronger man has to yield to the weaker man. Otherwise, might will be right. An illustration is given of an infirm person getting his remedy against the strong man by the process of law administered by the king. It is clear from the Brihadaranyakopanishad passage that the word 'Dharma' is used in its abstract sense, in the meaning of the English word 'Law' and the reign of Dharma mentioned here means, the same thing that the reign of law connotes in English jurisprudence and this reign of Dharma is equated with the supremacy of truth. Thus the word Dharma is often used in conjunction with two other words, Rita and Satya ( ऋत सत्य ). In his commentary on the above passage of the Brihadaranyakopanishad, Sankara explains the meaning of the words 'Satya' and 'Dharma' in this context. He says:

सत्यं यथाशास्त्रार्थता; स एव अनुष्ठीयमानः धर्मनामा भवति ।  
Satya is the true import of the Sastras and when that is translated into action, it becomes Dharma. The word

Rita ( ऋत ) occurs in the Rig Veda;

ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीद्धात् तपसोऽध्यजायत ।

Explaining the meaning of the word Rita ( ऋत )  
Vidyaranya, in his commentary says:—

ऋतं मानसं यथार्थसङ्कल्पनम् ।

Rita is the mental realisation of the actual truth. In fact ऋतम् as used in the Veda denotes the moral order of the cosmos. While these words are used in sequence, ऋत denotes the mental realisation of truth, सत्यं is the outward expression of truth and Dharma is the observance in action of truth. In short, Rita is truth in thought, Satya is truth in words, and Dharma is truth in deed.

The Maha Bharata has for its hero Dharmaputra, the son of धर्म and the whole life of this hero is depicted in this great Epic, as having been devoted to the pursuit of Dharma in spite of the travails and the sufferings which he undergoes. He ever had before him the ideals of Dharma and followed those ideals in all his actions. In the Epic what the Dharma is which is to be followed in every crisis is enunciated. The Mahabharata also contains a large number of Upakhyanas illustrating various Dharmas for various individuals as members of the family, of society, as citizens of the State and of the world.

One of such Upakhyanas is the Yaksha-Prasna which has been translated in this book. The Dharmas enunciated therein by way of questions and answers have been fully described.

From the above detailed reference to the meaning of the word Dharma in various contexts, it will be



seen that Dharma is the gamut of all duties which a person should observe and by which the moral order of society and humanity is maintained. It is the observance of these duties that gives stability to the family and prevents its disintegration. The peculiarity of the enunciation of Dharma in our Sastras and in our Epics is that it emphasises entirely duties and not rights. It is by the observance of duties that the corresponding rights are protected and enforced. By prescribing the duties of the husband towards the wife, the rights of the wife are also enunciated and protected. Similarly by enunciating the duties of the wife towards husband, the rights of the husband are also described.

As already mentioned, the object of Dharma is the securing of the welfare of all mankind. But the method adopted for achieving the welfare by Dharma is one of non-violence and of sacrifice. In fact, the Mahabharata in Santi Parva, Adhyaya 109, Sloka 15, says, as follows:

अहिंसार्थाय भूतानां धर्मप्रवचनं कृतम् ।  
यः स्यादहिंसासंयुक्तः स धर्म इति निश्चयः ।

Dharma has been enunciated for the sake of non-violence towards all beings. Whatever is associated with non-violence is Dharma. In fact, the Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Adhyaya 11 says:

अहिंसा परमो धर्मः ।

Thus, Rama in his duty of obedience to his father and protecting his father's *pratijna* sacrifices his comforts, his happiness and his kingdom, and speaks not one word in anger, and entertains no anger in his mind. Similarly Sita, even in her distress, of abandon-

ment by Rama, says not a word in anger, but prays that she should be born again to become the wife of Rama without undergoing the suffering of separation.

साहं तपस्सूर्यनिषिद्धदृष्टिः ऊर्ध्वं प्रसूतेश्चरितुं यतिष्ये ।  
भूयो यथा मे जननान्तरेपि त्वमेव भर्ता न च विप्रयोगः ॥

In the *Yaksha Prasna* itself when the Yaksha offers to restore one of the brothers to life and asks Yudhistira to choose one only, Yudhistira chooses Nakula in preference to Bheemasena and Arjuna. When asked why he did not choose his uterine brother, Bheemasena or Arjuna, both of whom he loves intensely, Dharmaputra explains: 'Bhima, Arjuna and I are the sons of Kunti. Nakula and Sahadeva are the sons of my step-mother Madri. Among Kunti's sons I survive the other two. If you would restore one of these four who lie dead, let it be one who will continue Madri's line.' The *Yaksha Prasna* extols this attitude of Dharmaputra as *आनृशंस्य* and says *आनृशंस्यं परो धर्मः*. By *आनृशंस्यं* is meant kindness to all without discrimination.

Pleased with this observance of the Dharma of equal kindness, the Yaksha granted him the boon of the restoration of all the brothers to life. This again exemplifies the statement that the straight pursuit of Dharma often involves the sacrifice of one's love and affection.

Further, according to the Hindu conception, the observance of one's duty is purely unilateral. The failure of a person to whom one owes his duty to observe his duties in relation to oneself, does not absolve one from performing his duty. In the Ramayana Sita says,

seen that Dharma is the gamut of all duties which a person should observe and by which the moral order of society and humanity is maintained. It is the observance of these duties that gives stability to the family and prevents its disintegration. The peculiarity of the enunciation of Dharma in our Sastras and in our Epics is that it emphasises entirely duties and not rights. It is by the observance of duties that the corresponding rights are protected and enforced. By prescribing the duties of the husband towards the wife, the rights of the wife are also enunciated and protected. Similarly by enunciating the duties of the wife towards husband, the rights of the husband are also described.

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Further, according to the Hindu conception, the observance of one's duty is purely unilateral. The failure of a person to whom one owes his duty to observe his duties in relation to oneself, does not absolve one from performing his duty. In the Ramayana Sita says,



दीनो वा राज्यहीनो वा यो मे भर्ता स मे गुरुः ।  
तं नित्यं अनुरक्तास्मि यथा सूर्यं सुवर्चला ॥

Sundarakanda 24th Sarga, 9th sloka.

and therefore resolves to go with Rama to the forest. The banishment of Sita does not form part of Dasaratha's *pratijna* and Vasishtha specially stated that it was the right of Sita to occupy the Yuvaraja's throne when her husband Rama was banished to the forest.

न गन्तव्यं वनं देव्या सीतया शीलवर्जिते ।  
अनुष्ठास्यति रामस्य सीता प्रकृतमासनम् ।  
आत्मा हि दाराः सर्वेषां दारसङ्ग्रहवर्तिनाम् ॥

Ayodhyakanda 73rd Sarga, Sloka 22, 24

and that Sita need not go to forest and she would succeed to the seat of Rama, as the wife was the self of a husband. अर्थो वा एष आत्मनो यत्पत्नी says the Veda. Yet she followed her husband to the forest.

A husband is not absolved from his duty to his wife even if she is of bad conduct. The worth of the other party to whom the duty is owed is not to be weighed in the scales of Dharma. One should not fail in one's duty because another fails in his. He will answer to the law of Karma for his breach of Dharma. That is the Hindu way of looking at the matter. The most glorious ideal of sacrifice in the performance of one's duty is exemplified in the Mahabharata by the character of the Great Bhishma. He gave up for the sake of high and noble duty all that men hold dear, a crown, married life and all its pleasures and progeny. He abandoned them all in the full flush of stalwart manhood, because his father Santanu desired to marry Satyawati and because Satyawati's father, the fisher-

man, said that the successor to the throne should be the issue of Satyawati and that a promise should be made to that effect before he consented to the marriage of Satyawati to Santanu. Bhishma in fulfilment of his loving duty did not ask himself the question 'Has my father any right to such a sacrifice from me?'

Following the basic conception of duty, the whole gamut of duties appertinent to every person in his relation to others as father, husband, son or wife or member of the society, citizen of the State and the world is described in our smritis. The religious literature on Dharma including the Epics and Puranas enunciated and classified the Dharmas. In the *Mitakshara*, the well known commentary on the *Yagnavalkya Smriti*, the Dharmas mentioned in the Smritis have been classified under the following six heads: (1) Varna Dharma, (2) Asrama Dharma, (3) Varnasrama Dharma, (4) Guna Dharma, (5) Nimitta Dharma and (6) Sadharana Dharma. Illustrations have also been given by him for each head of Dharmas. To mention a few typical examples, the Brahmin must always avoid and abstain from liquor. This Dharma is peculiar to this Varna. Hence it is called *Varna Dharma*. The worship of fire is the Dharma for the Grihasta, hence, this is Asrama Dharma. गृहस्थाश्रम धर्मः । Brahmin Brahmacharis (boys) should have the Palasa Danda, this being the example for *Varnaasrama Dharma*. *Guna Dharma* is the duty of the king to protect his subjects. *Nimitta Dharma* is the undergoing of various *prayaschittas*, for the sins of commission, and omission. The *Sadharana* or *Samanya Dharmas* are those like Ahimsa, Satya, etc. The great

Manu refers in the sixth chapter, sloka 92 to the ten Sadharana Dharmas.

धृतिः क्षमा दमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

धीः विद्या सत्यमक्रोधः दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥

The Samanya Dharmas are firmness, patience, self-control, non-stealing, purity of body, mind and speech, control of the senses, strength of mind, wisdom, truth, and absence of anger. In the observance of the Sadharana Dharma, Indian thinkers postulate an absolute and higher ideal of Dharma. That ideal is known as महाव्रत । The *Yogasutra* of Patanjali defines it as:

जातिवैशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमाः महाव्रताः ।

The Mahavrata is that which is universal, unconditional by the nature of the thing, place, time and circumstances. It is the absolute ideal illustrated by the tragedy of King Harischandra who experienced untold sufferings bereft of his kingdom, his wife, son etc. The Hindu sages are however keenly alive to the limitations of practical life and society and speak of a lower standard in the case of the Samanya Dharma. If the observance of the absolute Samanya Dharma will lead to the harm of another individual or of society in general, such absolute ideal need not be adopted. This is illustrated by a story given by Shri Krishna in the *Santi Parva* of a person who after taking a vow of speaking truth in all circumstances revealed the fact that a person who had sought shelter from the pursuit of a highway robber was hiding in his hermitage, and the result was that the robber caught hold of the man. Speaking the truth on that occasion in answer to the robber's question as to the whereabouts of the person

concealed under his roof resulted in harm to the person who had taken refuge. Similarly absolute ahimsa is impossible in actual life and therefore exceptions have been recognised. Sastras recognise a well known exception to ahimsa in yajnas which are performed for the welfare of mankind and in also wars for defence and for righteous causes. On account of all these various factors, in a particular context there may arise a conflict of Dharmas and an individual is put to the greatest strain to choose properly the observance of the particular Dharma suited to the occasion and according to the Sastra. Hence in the *Santi Parva*, the *Mahabharata* says:

सूक्ष्मा गतिर्हि धर्मस्य सूक्ष्मत्वात् बहुनिर्णयः ।

'The way of Dharma is subtle. On account of the nature of Dharma which has to be ascertained by the consideration of many factors, it is difficult to be understood.' That the way of Dharma is subtle and complicated is also adverted to in the *Yaksha Prasna* in the following sloka (114):

तर्कोऽप्रतिष्ठः श्रुतयो विभिन्नाः नैको मुनिः यस्य मतं प्रमाणम् ।  
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ॥

'There is no finality to intellectual reasoning. The Smritis are conflicting. No one's view is authoritative. The principle of Dharma is hidden and subtle. The only way is to follow the way of great men.' In the context of conflict of Dharmas another test also is mentioned. Kalidasa speaks of the authority of one's own conscience:

सतां हि सन्द्देहपदेषु वस्तुषु प्रमाणमन्तःकरणप्रवृत्तयः ।

It is 'the conscience of good men'. In speaking about



the pramanas of Dharma, Manu mentions the following order:

वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलं स्मृतिशीले च तद्विदाम् ।  
आचारश्चैव साधूनाम् । आत्मनस्तुष्टिरेव च ॥

The last of the pramanas is the satisfaction of one's own conscience. Yagnavalkya also refers to the pramanas for Dharma as follows in his Smriti:

श्रुतिः स्मृतिः सदाचारः स्वस्य च प्रियमात्मनः ।  
सम्यक्सङ्कल्पजः कामः धर्ममूलमिव स्मृतम् ॥

By its delineation of the characters of the heroes and heroines, the Mahabharata is the greatest exponent of the Dharma that is to be observed in all situations, where conflict of Dharmas arises. It shows to us how the great personages solved this conflict and pursued the most proper Dharma under the particular circumstances that arose. In some cases the solutions effected by the great heroes of Mahabharata may be open to controversy. For example, Bhishma was entirely in agreement with, and sympathetic to the Pandavas in their struggle for the kingdom, against Dhuryodhana. He was also very fond of the Pandavas and loved them for their goodness. Still, when the great war was to take place between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, he was the Commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army and fought a glorious battle lasting for 10 days against the Pandavas. While fighting on the side of the Kauravas, he exhibited by his acts his sympathy with the Pandavas and his solicitude for their victory. In fact, he also instructed Arjuna as to the method to be adopted to vanquish him. The question may arise whether it was proper for Bhishma to fight on the side of

the Kauravas when he entirely disapproved their conduct. When asked about the impropriety of his action in fighting the Pandavas, Bhishma replied:

अर्थस्य पुरुषो दासः दासस्त्वय्यो न कस्य चित् ।  
इति सत्यं महाराज बद्धोऽस्म्यर्थेन कोरवैः ॥

(Bhishma Parva, Adhyaya 43, Sloka 41). 'Man is the slave of material interests. But material interests are not the slaves of any one. Thus truly I have been bound by the Kauravas through material interest.'

This answer does not seem to be entirely satisfying. It does not absolve him from the duty to his moral conscience.

धर्मं एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।  
तस्मात् धर्मं न त्यजामि मा नो धर्मो हतोऽवधीत् ॥

Yaksha Prasna—127

'Dharma destroyed destroys. Dharma protected, protects. Therefore, I shall not abandon Dharma. Let not Dharma destroy us.' Hence it is that in the first sloka of the *Bharatasavitri*, Vyasa declares, that Artha and Kama are the products of Dharma and that Artha and Kama which are not obtained by Dharma have to be eschewed. Manu also lays down as follows:

परित्यजेदर्थकामौ यो स्यातां धर्मवर्जितौ ।  
धर्मं चाप्यसुखोदकं लोकविकृष्टमेव च ॥

Adhyaya 4. Sloka 176

'Let every individual abandon Artha and Kama which are devoid of Dharma and also that Dharma which is not conducive to human happiness and censured by all.'



The Commentator of the Mahabharata, Neelakantha declares the essence of the teaching of the Mahabharata thus:

धर्मादित्रयमर्थकामकरणप्रीत्यर्थमित्यल्पकाः

धीशुद्धिकृतुजीवनार्थकतया मुक्त्यर्थमित्युत्तमाः ।

एतत्पाण्डवधर्तारण्डचरितव्याख्यामिषात् दक्षितम्

येनासौ निजवाक्यजातहृदयं मह्यं ददात्वादरात् ॥

The petty minded people pursue Dharma for the sake of wealth. But high minded ones pursue Dharma for the sake of purification of the mind. The Mahabharata lays down that Dharma should be performed for the sake of Dharma only and not for the sake of enjoyments and desires. The only satisfaction is that one has done one's duty. Virtue is its own reward. It is with this background that one has to study the purport of the questions and answers in the *Yaksha Prasna*.

The *Yaksha Prasna* occurs in the *Araneya Parva*, being a subdivision of the *Vana Parva*. The *Yaksha Prasna* proper namely, the questions asked by the Yaksha and the answers given by Dharmaputra is preceded by the story narrating how Dharmaputra was put to the test of answering the series of questions by the Yaksha. Dharmaputra and his brothers were residing in the *Dwaita Vana*. Then, on one occasion, a deer in the forest picked with its horns the sticks called Arani used for making fire and the churning staff called Mantha, belonging to a brahmin. The stick and staff are used for the purpose of producing fire in which the Agnihotra oblations are offered. Taking these articles with its horns the deer ran away quickly. The brahmin was in great anguish on account of the loss of the

sticks and staff and came to the *asrama* of Dharmaputra and wailed over what had happened. One of the duties of a kshatriya is to protect the brahmins and others against any obstacles in the discharge of the duties of their varna. Hence the king is often called: वर्णाश्रमवर्धरक्षिता. Dharmaputra and his brothers bestirred themselves and went in pursuit of the deer. The deer was fleet of foot and escaped their arrows. After sometime it disappeared.

Wearied by the chase and fatigued by heat, hunger and thirst, Dharmaputra and his brothers sought the shade of a banyan tree. Nakula then began to talk about the sufferings they had undergone. He said: 'Even though we have been strictly following Dharma, suffering seems to be our lot.' Yudhishtira attributed it to the decree of Dharma, which distributes the fruits of virtue and vice. But Bheemasena said that it was due to his not killing Dussasana then and there when he dragged Draupadi in the assembly. Arjuna said: 'We should have spoken against Karna' and Sahadeva said that all these calamities were due to the fact that he did not kill Sakuni.

Dharmaputra remained patient. Probably he did not approve of the sentiments expressed by Bheema, Arjuna and Sahadeva.

Dharmaputra asked Nakula to go up the tree and see if there was water anywhere nearby. Nakula did so and said that there was a pond close to that place judging from a cluster of trees there and the cries of cranes. He was asked to fetch water immediately from the pond. When he went to the pond and began to drink

the water to quench his thirst, he heard a voice saying 'who commits this rash act? The lake is mine. First answer my questions and then drink.' But disregarding the voice, he drank the water and dropped down dead. Similarly Sahadeva, Bheemasena and Arjuna also who were sent by Yudhishtira shared the same fate. Finally Dharmaputra himself went to the pond and saw his brothers lying apparently dead.

He first gave vent to his grief; but soon controlling himself he wondered who could have slain his brothers who were mighty heroes. Anyhow, he determined to drink the water and then find out who did so. When he was stepping into the lake he heard the same voice forbidding him from drinking. Dharmaputra desisted from drinking the water and asked who it was that slew his brothers. Thereupon an Yaksha appeared before him and spoke to him. He said that it was by him that they were slain. "They did not heed my warning and drank the water, and so I slew them. If you wish to live, first answer my questions and then drink as you please!"

Dharmaputra immediately said that he was prepared to answer the questions. Then follows the *Yaksha Prasna* consisting of the questions of Yaksha on the nuances of Dharma and Dharmaputra's answers to them. This introductory story also illustrates how Dharmaputra and his brothers observed the Kshatriya Dharma, in spite of the difficulties they had to undergo in its observance.

Being test questions, they are in the nature of riddles and they were answered with great difficulty. In

some instances it is not easy to understand the meanings of the questions and the answers also have to be interpreted with some difficulty. Here an attempt has been made to give a translation of the *Yakshaprasna* and also notes on every verse. The *Yaksha-prasna* teaches many profound moral truths and ideals worthy of study, reflection and observance in action.

"Ashrama"  
Luz, Madras 4.

K. BALASUBRAMANIA IYER



The Socratic method of question and answer is a time-honoured method adopted for imparting knowledge. It has been in vogue in India also as the method of expounding the truths of our Dharma in an effective and impressive way. The questions are sometimes in the nature of puzzles and riddles and can be answered only by a highly intellectual person well-versed in the subject. The answers are often as brief and cryptic as the questions themselves and convey a wealth of meaning. Even as early as the Vedas, there are examples of this method. Here is one taken from the *Taittiriya Samhita*, Kanda 7, *Prasna* 4, *Anuvaka* 18, *Asvamedha Prakarana*:

कस्विदेकाकी चरति क उ स्वज्जायते पुनः ।  
सूर्य एकाकी चरति चन्द्रमा जायते पुनः ॥  
किं स्वद्विमस्य भेषजं किं स्वदावपनं महत् ।  
अग्निहिमस्य भेषजं भूमिरावपनं महत् ॥

'Who moves alone? Who is born again?'

'The Sun moves alone. The Moon is born again.'

'What is the remedy for cold? Which is the great seed-bed?'

'Fire is the remedy for cold. The Earth is the great seed-bed.'

The *Prasnottaramalika* of Sri Sankaracharya is conceived on the same model and conveys the truths of Dharma and Metaphysics through straight questions and simple, but clear answers.



The *Yaksha Prasna* is found in the Aranya Sub-Parva of the Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata*. It is a dialogue between a Yaksha and Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, also known as Dharmaputra.

While the Pandavas were in exile in the forest, a Brahmana sought their help to get back the pieces of Arani wood used for making fire by churning, which had been carried away from his hermitage by a deer. The brothers chased the deer in the forest which, however, being fleet of foot, eluded their grasp. They got tired and thirsty and wanted water. Climbing a tall tree, Nakula saw a lake at a distance. He was sent to fetch water from there. He went there and before he could raise the water to his lips, a Yaksha bade him answer the questions he would put him before he touched the water. Unmindful of the command, Nakula drank the water and fell down unconscious. The same happened to Sahadeva, Arjuna and Bhima, who went in quest of Nakula. At last Dharmaputra went to the lake and saw his brothers lying senseless on the ground and was overwhelmed with grief. When he got into the water to perform his ablutions, the Yaksha bade him also answer his questions. Dharmaputra agreed, and then followed the dialogue between the celestial being who was no other than Dharmaraja, the God of Death, who rules according to Dharma, and Yudhishtira, who is the incarnation of Dharmaraja. Upon Yudhishtira answering the questions satisfactorily, the Yaksha restored the brothers back to life. The questions and the answers constitute the portion called *Yaksha Prasna* in the *Mahabharata*.

Like the *Vidura Niti*, the *Yaksha Prasna* is an ethico-philosophical discourse pregnant with spiritual import. Terse and puzzling as the questions were, only a master-mind as that of Yudhishtira, who was absolutely clear in his knowledge of the eternal Dharma, as he was steadfast in his uncompromising allegiance to it, could have answered them in the way that he did.

Like the questions, the answers too cannot be understood without a commentary and this has been provided by Sri Neelakanta, the famous commentator on the *Mahabharata*.

### 1<sup>a</sup> (4)<sup>b</sup>

The first sloka of the *Yaksha Prasna* consists of four questions asked by the Yaksha:

किं स्वदादित्यं उन्नयति ।  
के च तस्याभितश्चराः ।  
कश्चैनमस्तं नयति  
कस्मिन् च प्रति तिष्ठति ॥

1. What is it that makes the sun rise up?
2. Who are his surrounding attendants?
3. Who makes the sun set?
4. In which is he firmly placed?

Yudhishtira answered:

ब्रह्मादित्यमुन्नयति ।  
देवास्तस्याभितश्चराः ।  
धर्मश्चास्तं नयति च  
सत्ये च प्रति तिष्ठति ॥

<sup>a</sup> No. of the Slokas.

<sup>b</sup> No. of Questions.

1. The Veda (Brahma) makes the sun rise.
2. The Devas are his attendants.
3. Dharma makes the sun set, and
4. He is firmly grounded in truth.

Neelakanta, the commentator, says that the questions and answers have been begun for the purpose of ascertaining the truth about the Atman. It has been said in the Upanishads that he who knows the Atman crosses over sorrow and that is the benefit one attains by the knowledge of the Atman. Hence he interprets the first question 'what makes the sun rise?' as 'what makes the Atman rise?' Though Aditya generally means the sun, it is interpreted as 'the soul of man,' as that which through the five senses gets the knowledge of sounds, etc.

When Yudhishtira gives the answer to this question as Veda, he takes it to mean that it is the Veda ('Brahma' is used as a synonym for 'Veda') that gives the knowledge of differentiating the pure Atman from the self which is frequently confused with the senses and the body from which it is different.

The answer of Dharmaputra that 'the Devas are the attendants' is interpreted by Neelakanta thus: 'By Devas are denoted *sama, dama*; etc. and it is with the aid of this that the knowledge of the Atman can be obtained. When Dharmaputra says 'that *dharma* makes the sun set,' by *dharma* he meant *karma, upasana*, etc. and these directly or indirectly make a man see the Atman in the 'akasa of the heart.' The answer 'is firmly grounded in truth' means 'that the *upasana* in the *akasa* of the heart leads one finally to see the truth of the

Absolute Reality, devoid of all *gunas*, which is pure consciousness. Thus Neelakanta interprets the question and the answer in the philosophical way.

If we take the word 'Aditya' as meaning 'the sun' only, the question has really reference to the following passage in the *Yajurveda* (Kathaka), where it is said that it is by the Riks that the sun rises in the first part of the day, it is by Yajus that it stands at noon in the middle of the sky and it is by the Samaveda that it attains the glory of the sunset.

ऋग्भिः पूर्वान्ते दिवि देव ईयते ।  
यजुर्वेदे तिष्ठति मध्ये अन्तः ।  
सामवेदेनास्तमये महीयते ।

*Taittiriyakathaka 3rd Prasna*  
9th Anuvaka

Another passage of the Veda in the Aruna says that the sun shines because of the Purusha of golden hue who is the inner being of the sun and he shines through the Veda.

सैषा त्रय्येव विद्या तपति य एषोऽन्तरादित्य हिरण्मयः पुरुषः ॥

*Taittiriyakathaka 3rd Prasna*  
14th Anuvaka

The second passage gives the clue to the philosophical interpretation of Neelakanta. The words of the question of the Yaksha seem to be taken from *Samaveda* which is as follows:

उन्नयामि-होइ-आदित्यं प्राञ्चं यन्तं उन्नयामि-होइ-  
अहोरात्राण्यरित्राणि-होइ-  
छौनौ-हाउ-तस्यामसावादित्य ईयते-हाउ-ईयते-हाउ-

*Samaveda-Aranya-Shukriya.*



The purport of the question and answer is 'there is a great law that governs the whole solar system and it is that which is responsible for the regular motion of the planets and the earth in their orbits, round the sun which is the astronomical explanation of the rising and setting of the sun.'

2 (8)

The Yaksha asks:

केनस्विच्छ्रोत्रियो भवति केनस्विद्विन्दते महत् ।  
केनस्विद्वितीयवान् भवति राजन् केन च बुद्धिमान् ।

*By what does a person become a Vedic scholar?*

*By what means does he attain the Great?*

*By what does a person acquire a second to him?*

*O, King! By what means does a man become wise?*

Yudhishtira answers:

श्रुतेन श्रोत्रियो भवति तपसा विन्दते महत् ।  
धृत्या द्वितीयवान् भवति बुद्धिमान् वृद्धसेवया ।

*By Vedic culture a person becomes a Vedic scholar.*

*By tapas a person attains the Great.*

*By steadfastness a person acquires a second to him.*

*By service of elders a person becomes wise.*

The word 'srottriya' according to the *Amarakosa* means a person who has made a study of the Vedas and can recite the text:

श्रोत्रियश्छन्दोऽधीते ।

By again mentioning *sruta*, Dharmaputra attaches a special significance to it. By *sruta* is meant not only learning or knowledge, but culture that is acquired by

proper learning. It is in that sense that Kalidasa uses it in the *Raghuvamsa*, 14th sarga, 61st sloka:

वाच्यस्त्वया मद्वचनात्स राजा वन्हौ विशुद्धामपि दत्तमक्षम् ।  
मां लोकवादश्रवणादहासीः श्रुतस्य किं तत्सदृशं कुलस्य ॥

In his answer, Dharmaputra emphasises that a person who has merely studied the Veda and can recite the text cannot be called a *srottriya* unless he is fully imbued with the Vedic tradition and culture.

In the second line the word 'Mahat' denotes 'Brahman' or Godhead. The Upanishad declares

अणोरणीयान् महतो महीयान् ।

The smallest of the small and the biggest of the big.

By *tapas* is meant spirituality and spiritual quest. In the *Dhatupata* of Panini we find तप आलोचने (Reflection is *tapas*) and the Upanishad says यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपः (whose *tapas* is constituted by *jnana*).

From these quotations we can arrive at the real meaning of the word तपस् (*tapas*) in this context. It really means the research into the true import of the Mahavakyas of the Vedanta. Neelakanta says श्रुतस्य अर्थस्य आलोचनेन (by reflection on the meaning of what has been heard).

In the next answer, Dharmaputra says that it is by steadfastness or धृति that a person is really helped. This word धृति has special significance as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।  
योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिस्सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥

It is the steadfastness that is attained by concentration and control of the mind, the *prana* or the vital energy, and the senses. It is this concentration that will help one to have *निदिध्यासन* (*nididhyasana*) according to the text of the Upanishad.

आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः

The Atman has to be experienced or perceived, first by hearing the meaning of the text of the *Upanishad Vakya*, then by contemplating on its true import and then by making it a part of your life, by concentration or *nididhyasana*.

In the next answer of Dharmaputra, the phrase *बृद्धसेवया* (service of elders) means what is denoted by the two well-known phrases *gurusushrusha* and *guru-prasada*. The Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया

(Know It—the Supreme Reality—by obeisance, by repeated questioning and by service to the *guru*).

Spiritual wisdom is attained by obeisance at the feet of the *guru*, by searching enquiries and by service to him. It is this service that Dharmaputra is thinking of in this context. The Upanishad tradition has always laid great emphasis on *gurusushrusha* and *guru-prasada* for spiritual illumination. The *Chandogyopanishad* says:

आचार्याद्विद्येव विद्या विदिता साधिष्ठं प्रापत् आचार्यवान् पुरुषो वेद ।  
Sankara Bhagavatpada in his *Vivekachudamani* extols the efficacy of service to elders—*mahapurusha samsraya*—as the means of attaining the grace of divinity.

दुर्लभं त्रयमेवंतद्देवानुग्रहेतुकम् ।

मनुष्यत्वं मुमुक्षुत्वं महापुरुषसंश्रयः ॥

Especially for the knowledge of Brahman, the instruction of the *guru* and his grace are essential.

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः

श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् । (मुण्डकोपनिषत्—अध्याय १)

For the understanding of It (Brahman), one should approach with a *samit* a *guru* who is *srotriya* (well versed in *Sruti*) and firmly established in Brahman. Sri Sankaracharya declares that even though a person is learned in the *Sastras*, he cannot independently pursue the quest for Brahman, but must seek the aid of the *guru*. In his *Bhashya*, explaining the एवकार in *गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्* he observes:

शास्त्रज्ञोपि स्वातन्त्र्येण ब्रह्मज्ञानान्वेषणं

न कुर्यात् इत्येतत् गुरुमेवेत्यवधारणफलम् ।

It will be noted that in the Upanishadic text the word *श्रोत्रिय* occurs. Sri Sankaracharya explains the meaning of it as follows:

अध्ययनश्रुतार्थसंपन्नः ।

(One possessed of the knowledge of the meaning of the Vedic text studied by him.)

By his answers to these four questions Dharmaputra clearly lays down that the *Veda* is the source-book for spiritual knowledge and in order to attain the Vedic culture, one has to study carefully the *Veda* text and then reflect on the true import of the great text of the *Vedanta* relating to the awareness of the Atman, sitting at the feet of the *guru* and doing service to him in all humility. With the aid of the *guru*, one attains real spiritual illumination by which the Absolute can be realised. Dharmaputra emphasises the need for the



practice of yoga for the control of the senses and the mind, to attain that spiritual consciousness which enables one to become aware of the truth. ऋतंभरा तत्र प्रज्ञा says the *Yogasutra* of Patanjali: 'It is there that the consciousness holds the truth'.

### 3 (12)

The Yaksha asks:

किं ब्राह्मणानां देवत्वम् कश्च धर्मःसतामिव ।  
कश्चैषां मानुषो भावः । किमेवामसतामिव ।

*What is the divine nature of Brahmanas?*

*What is their right conduct similar to that of the good?*

*In what consists their ordinary human nature? and What is it in them that is similar to that of the bad?*

Yudhishtira answers:

स्वाध्याय एषां देवत्वम् तप एषां सतामिव ।  
मरणं मानुषो भावः परिवादोऽसतामिव ।

*The knowledge of the Vedas is their divine nature.*

*Their tapas is similar to that of the good.*

*Their mortality is the ordinary human nature.*

*Talking scandal is their conduct similar to that of the bad.*

The Sruti says that the Devas reside in the Brahmana who has got knowledge of the Vedas.

यावतीर्वे देवतास्तास्सर्वा वेदविदि ब्राह्मणे वसन्ति ।  
तस्माद्ब्राह्मणेभ्यो वेदविद्भ्यो दिवे दिवे नमस्कुर्व्यात् ।

[*Taittiriya Aranyaka*]

Therefore it is that, every day, obeisance should be made to the Brahmana who has got knowledge of the

Vedas. Ever since the *rishis* first gave expression to the Vedas which are eternal, the words of the Vedas were scrupulously handed down from generation to generation for centuries in our country in the families of the *rishis*. It is in that way that the Veda has been preserved intact without any alteration or addition or change of readings for thousands of years. Even if the Vedas were committed to writing, they could not have been preserved in the perfect manner in which they have been. Errors, alterations or omissions should surely have crept in on account of the manuscript writers. But the गुरुमुख अध्ययन, learning to recite after the manner of the *guru* and in his presence, has enabled our people to preserve the Vedas in their original form and substance. The *swara* system of उदात्त, अनुदात्त and स्वरित together with the *siksha* and *chandasa* have all been of immense help in this successful achievement. That is why the Veda itself has extolled the Brahmana families who have kept the Vedas intact. Hence Dharmaputra expresses his firm conviction that it is the knowledge of the Veda which gives the divine attribute to the Brahmana and makes him the object of veneration in society. It is the Vedic *mantras* that enable one to get the grace of the gods by which the country will get rain and attain prosperity. As the Veda *mantras* which the Brahmana recites produce these beneficent results (on account of the grace of the gods), the knowledge of the Vedic *mantras* gives him the देवत्व.

Lord Krishna says in the *Mahabharata*:

देवाधीनं जगत्सर्वं मन्त्राधीनं तु देवतम् ।  
ते मन्त्रा ब्राह्मणाधीना ब्राह्मणो मम देवतम् ॥

The whole universe is dependent on God. God is responsive to the utterance of *mantras*; the Brahmanas have the knowledge of *mantras*. So the Brahmana is my God. King Bhoja also stated to the same effect as follows:

उच्चैर्गतिर्जगति सिध्यति धर्मतश्चेत्  
तस्य प्रमा च वचनैः कृतकैरेदचेत् ।  
तेषां प्रकाशनदशा च महीसुरैश्चेत्  
तानन्तरेण निपतेत् क्वनु मत्प्रणामः ॥

If it is true that eminence is attained by the practice of Dharma, if the knowledge of Dharma arises from the words of Veda which are not human creations, and if it is true that their dissemination is to be by Brahmanas, to whom other than the Brahmanas can my prostrations be?

The purport of the next question and answer is that the knowledge of the Veda alone does not make a good Brahmana. But as Neelakanta says, it is *तपस्* by which is denoted *सदाचार*, *शम*, and *दम*. While *sadachara* is religious discipline which maintains the purity of the body, by *sama* and *dama* are achieved control and purity of the mind. It is these two qualities that constitute the good. Hence the question of the Yaksha, What is that which is similar to that of the conduct of the good?

*Manushya bhava* is literally translated as *human-ness*. Yudhishtira says that mortality is humanness. That is the characteristic of man as such. Man is mortal. To the material side of man attaches mortality. But man has the immortal part; that is what he calls *Devatva*. Neelakanta, in explaining this, says that

*मानुषोभाव* means *देहाद्यभिमानः*, love of the body and senses alone without caring for the soul and spirit and that the materialistic outlook will be the cause of the eternal cycle of birth and death, *janana* and *marana*. With the same purport, the *Katakopanishad* uses the word *martya*: *सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिव आजायते पुनः*. Like the corn, man ripens unto death and is born again.

The great law-giver Manu is emphatically of the opinion that

अनभ्यासेन वेदानामाचारस्य च वर्जनात् ।  
अलस्यादन्नदोषाच्च मृत्युर्विप्राञ्जिघांसति ॥

The absence of the study of the Vedas is mentioned as one of the causes which lead to the death of the Brahmana.

Having these great sayings in view, Yudhishtira rightly emphasises strongly that the knowledge of the Veda and the control of the mind and senses are the essential attributes of a good Brahmana. The meaning of the words *Deva* and *Manushya* is also clear from this reference to the *Devamanushya* in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7th adhyaya, 6th khanda.

ध्यायन्तीह देवमनुष्याः तस्मात् य इह मनुष्याणां महत्त्वं प्राप्नुवन्ति ।  
In his commentary on this text Sankara says as follows:

देवमनुष्याः । देवसमाः मनुष्याः; समाधिगुणसंपन्नाः मनुष्याः  
देवस्वरूपं न जहतीत्यर्थः ॥

Godlike men, those who possess the quality of *samadhi* or concentrated contemplation due to the control of the mind and senses, never abandon their divine nature. According to Neelakanta, the word *परिवाद* denotes slander of the Devas and Brahmanas etc. and absence



of *sadachara*. These two constitute the bad quality of the Brahmana. The same above mentioned text of *Chandogya Upanishad* refers to small peoples as उपवादिनः अल्पाः कल्हिनः, पिशुनाः. The word उपवादिनः corresponds to परिवादः in the Yaksha Prasna sloka.

#### 4 (16)

The next four questions and answers are contained in the following stanzas:

किं क्षत्रियाणां देवत्वम् कश्च धर्मः सतामिव ।  
कश्चैषां मानुषो भावः किमेषामसतामिव ।

*What constitutes the divineness of Kshatriyas or warriors?*

*What is their quality similar to that of goodness? (i.e. what is their virtue?)*

*What constitutes their humanness?*

*What is their quality similar to that of bad men?*

Dharmaputra answered as follows:

इष्वस्त्रमेषां देवत्वं यज्ञ एषां सतामिव ।  
भयं वै मानुषो भावः परित्यागोऽसतामिव ॥

*Arrows and missiles constitute their excellence.*

*Yagnas or sacrifices are their good qualities.*

*Their humanness consists in fear.*

*Abandonment of the afflicted is their bad quality.*

The questions and answers are of the same pattern as the previous ones about Brahmanas or learned men. From the use of the word 'devatva' again in the case of Kshatriya, the true import of the word devatva becomes clear. Devatva does not mean in this context the status of a *deva*. It only means excellence or the quality like

that of a *deva*. It is *divineness*. The word *deva* occurs in the following sukta of the *Rigveda*.

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम्

Sayana in his *Bhashya* says as follows:

देवशब्दः दान दीप द्योतनानां अन्यतममर्थं आचष्टे ।

It means that quality which makes the possessor to shine brightly. Therefore devatva in the context means the quality that gives lustre to the Kshatriya. It is his military prowess that is indicated by the words i.e. arrows and missiles. Therefore the import of the question and answer is that it is military prowess that gives lustre to the warrior.

The performance of *yagnas* like Aswamedha, Rajasuya, etc. constitutes the virtue or good conduct of the Kshatriya. While, by his military prowess, a Kshatriya ruler may establish an empire, still the performance of Aswamedha or Rajasuya sacrifice is a meritorious act performed soon after his conquests. Hence, Dharmaputra says that performance of *yagnas* constitutes good conduct of the Kshatriya or the warrior.

The meaning of the next question and answer is that fear or cowardice is the human weakness of the Kshatriya.

The meaning of the answer to the fourth question is that failure to protect and help the distressed will be the dark spot in his nature. The very word Kshatriya has been interpreted by Kalidasa in *Raghuvamsa*, 2nd canto, in the following *sloka*:

क्षतात्किल त्रायत इत्युदग्रः क्षत्रस्य शब्दो भुवनेषु रूढः ।

“He who protects one from injury” is the well-known import of the word Kshatriya. The greatness of this quality is beautifully illustrated by a story in the *Markandeya Purana*. There was once a king named Maharaja Vipaschit. He ruled very wisely and well. He observed all the religious duties enjoined on a Kshatriya. On his death, he attained heaven as reward for his virtue. But there was one remissness on his part amounting to a sin which had to be expiated by his stay in Naraka for 3½ *nadigas*. Accordingly, Maharaja Vipaschit went to hell and his very presence was a source of alleviation of the suffering of the denizens of hell. The fragrance proceeding from his body was soothing to all of them. A well-known Vedic saying may be quoted here:

यथा वृक्षस्य संपुष्पितस्य दूरात् गन्धो वाति  
एवं पुण्यस्य कर्मणो दूरात् गन्धो वाति ।

“Just as the fragrance coming from a tree full of flowers can be smelt at a distance, the ‘fragrance’ from the punyakarma of a person is felt even from a distance.” As soon as the allotted time passed, king Vipaschit had to depart from hell to his heavenly abode. But all the denizens of hell implored him with one voice to stay on so that his presence would give them relief for a long time. The heavenly messenger insisted that the king should come away soon. It is at that time that the king gave expression to his resolve to abandon heaven and to stay in hell only for the purpose of relieving the distressed. All the *devas* and *rishis* acclaimed his selflessness and virtue, and they said that protection of those who seek it is a greater virtue than

even the observance of all religious duties enjoined by the sastras. So Dharmaputra declares that the protection of the weak who have sought refuge is the greatest duty of the Kshatriya.

## 5 (20)

The next four questions and answers are contained in the following stanza:

किमेकं यज्ञियं साम किमेकं यज्ञियं यजुः ।  
का चैषां वृणुते यज्ञं कां यज्ञो नातिवर्तते ॥

*What is the Sama which is beneficial for the sacrifice?*

*What is the Yajus which is beneficial to yagna?*

*Which among them is chosen for the yagna itself?*

*What is that which the sacrifice cannot be without?*

Dharmaputra answered as follows:

प्राणो वै यज्ञियं साम मनो वै यज्ञियं यजुः ।  
ऋगेका वृणुते यज्ञं तां यज्ञो नातिवर्तते ॥

*Prana or vital energy is the Sama which is most helpful to the sacrifice.*

*Manas or mind is the Yajus which is most helpful to the sacrifice. It is the Rik which chooses the yagna for itself.*

*It is the Rik alone which yagna or sacrifice cannot do without.*

Both the questions and the answers have reference to matters connected with yagna. It is the Vedas that are most intimately connected with yagna. As it is well-known, in the yagna there are three sets of Ritviks



or Priests who officiate, namely, the Hota, Adhvaryu and Udgata. The Hota is the person who recites the *Rik mantras* invoking the respective *devatas* in the sacrifice. The *Rik mantras* recited are also known as *sastra*. The Adhvaryu is the person who is concerned with the procedure in the sacrifice, especially the *homa* or the oblation in the fire. He recites the *Brahmana mantras* in connection with that. The Udgata is the person who sings the Sama in praise of the gods. All the three are necessary for the performance of the *yagna*. *Yagna* has always been considered the most important ritual, by the performance of which the country as a whole attains wealth and prosperity. By the performance of *yagnas*, timely rains will result, favourable for agriculture.

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यः ।

says the *Bhagavat Gita*.

Manu himself says:

अग्नौ प्रास्ताहुतिः सम्यगादित्यमुपतिष्ठते ।

आदित्याज्जायते वृष्टिर्वृष्टेरन्नं ततः प्रजाः ॥

This is the reason why though the *rishis* were strongly against *himsa*, still they permitted the sacrifice of animals in *yagna*. Hence the question of the Yaksha which is about *yagna* refers to the Sama and Yajus which pertain to the *yagna*. The Yaksha asks, assuming that the Sama is necessary for the *yagna*, what is the Sama which is most helpful? The question is a trifle searching one and really requires a careful answer as all Samas are helpful to the *yagna*. Hence the answering person must really seek to find out the intention of the Yaksha in asking the question.

Apart from the physical performance of the *yagna*, the Upanishad describes upasanas based on the Sama, Yajus and Rik.

त्रयो वेदा एत एव चाग्नेवर्चो, मनो यजुर्वेदः प्राणः सामवेदः ।  
(बृ० ५-९)

The Brihadaranyakopanishad requires the upasaka or the person in meditation to think of Rik as Vak or speech, the Yajus as manas or mind, and the Sama as prana. The Chandogyopanishad also refers to the Rik being considered as Vak and the Sama as prana. It also mentions the reason for looking upon the Sama as prana on account of the connection between the two.

स्वरात्मकत्वात् साम्न ( १-८ )

indicates that the utterance of the Sama depends on swara and swara depends upon prana. It is therefore clear now why the upasaka is directed to look upon Sama as prana. While in the *karmakanda*, *yagna* is looked upon as ritual for the propitiation of the gods, the very same *yagna* or the component parts of it are utilised for the purpose of upasana and the mental processes necessary for it.

The Yajus used for the purpose of the *yagna* may be contemplated as manas or mind. A thinking mind and retentive memory are necessary for the purpose of seeing that the procedure of the *yagna* is strictly followed in its performance. Hence the upasaka is directed to contemplate the Yajus as mind. The *Rik mantras* are most essential in a *yagna* for the purpose of invoking the grace of the gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni etc. Hence it may be said that it is the Rik alone that really

forms the effective *yagna*. This speech has taken the form of Rik; hence, it follows that Vak is essential for *yagna*. Therefore it is that Dharmaputra says that Vak chooses the *yagna* for its own. In this context, it is necessary to quote the reference from Satapatha-brahmana to understand the form which the answer of Dharmaputra has taken.

यज्ञ। इयं वा योषा। त्वं तु पुमान्। तस्मात् तां उपामन्त्रस्व  
(शतपथ ब्राह्मण ३-२-१)

It is said there that the Vak courts the *yagna*, Vak being looked upon as a lady and that is why Dharmaputra uses the word which means also to court. Dharmaputra also adds that we cannot do without the Rik or Vak in a *yagna*.

*Yagnas* are of two kinds, one the external *yagna* and the other internal. Neelakanta, the commentator, here has explained the meaning of the above stanzas as relating to the internal *yagna* which is known as *gnana-yagna*. By *gnanayagna* is meant the attainment of gnana of the Brahman or the supreme. For this purpose the control of the breath of prana and the control of the mind are both necessary. Then the understanding and the realisation of the truth of the Mahāvakyas indicated by the word Vak is necessary and without this, the knowledge of the Brahman cannot be obtained.

6 (24)

The next four questions are

किंस्विदावपतां श्रेष्ठं किंस्विन्नवपतां वरम्।  
किंस्वित् प्रतिष्ठमानानां किंस्वित् प्रसवतां वरम्॥

What is the best among those that shower?  
What is the foremost among those put into the ground?

What is the best among the four-footed animals?  
What is the best among those that are begotten?

Dharmaputra replies thus:

वर्षमावपतां श्रेष्ठं बीजं निवपतां वरम्।  
गावः प्रतिष्ठमानानां पुत्रः प्रसवतां वरः॥

The rain is the best among those that shower.

Seed is the foremost of those that are put into the ground.

Cows are the best among four-footed animals.

The son is the foremost among those that are begotten. ?

The word Prathishtamananam is understood as four-footed beings.

This is explained in *Sankarabhashya* as referring to the quadrupeds or four-footed animals.

“पादाभ्यां हि प्रतितिष्ठति”

7 (25)

The Yaksha asked:

इन्द्रियार्थाननुभवन् बुद्धिमान् लोकपूजितः।  
संमतः सर्वभूतानां उच्छ्वसन् को न जीवति॥

Who is that, enjoying the objects of senses, endowed with intellect, respected by the world and accepted by all beings, though breathing, does not live?



Dharmaputra replied:

देवतातिथिभृत्यानां पितृणां मात्मनश्च यः ।  
न निर्वपति पञ्चानां उच्छ्वसन्न स जीवति ॥

"He who does not propitiate by offerings, the Devas, guests, dependants, pitris and one's own self, those five, though breathing does not live."

Both the question and answer refer to the well-known Panchamahayagnas enjoined by the Hindu Smritis on every grihastha or householder. In fact, the question puts us in mind of the 72nd sloka in *Manu-smriti*, Adhyaya 3, which runs on the same terms as Dharmaputra's answer. Hence the question is framed in the manner above mentioned. The Yaksha is extolling these fivefold yagnas by condemning a person who does not perform them and who, he says, though breathing does not live. The question and answer clearly convey in what way the Sanatana Dharma regards the five duties of a Hindu grihastha, without the daily performance of which, from the spiritual point of view, his life becomes worthless, even though, from the worldly point of view, he may be a great and good man. Hence, the Yaksha uses the laudatory terms *buddhi-man*, *lokapujita*, *Sammata* sarvabhutanam.

These five duties to the devas, the pitris, the guests, the dependants and to one's own self enjoined on a householder are described by Manu as mahayagnas, while the srauta sacrifices enjoined in the Karmakanda of the Vedas are described as yagnas.

In another verse (Adh. 2. sloka 28) Manu declares that the body of man becomes fit for the attainment of

spirituality or the awareness of Brahman by the performance of mahayagnas and yagnas:

महायज्ञश्च यज्ञश्च ब्राह्मीयं क्रियते तनुः ।

Therein, the panchayagnas and srauta yagnas are differentiated by the use of the expressions, mahayagnas and yagnas. There is also authority in the Veda for the five mahayagnas. The *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, Prasna 2, runs as follows:—

पञ्च वा एते महायज्ञाः सतति प्रतायन्ते  
सतति संतिष्ठन्ते देवयज्ञः पितृयज्ञो  
भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञ-इति ॥

The word yagna is derived from the root यज् पूजने (to worship). It generally therefore refers to an act of worship. Technically, in the Karmakanda it refers to the sacrifices mentioned therein as in the Vedavakya

स्वर्गकामो यजेत ।

Here yagna is interpreted as the offering of dravya (material) owned by a person to the particular devata with a view to propitiate him, with the appropriate mantras. The meaning of the word yagna has been expanded from this technical sense to denote all acts of dedication to God in a spirit of worship and sacrifice. For example, the atithiyagna (अतिथियज्ञ), feeding of the guests, is regarded as a yagna as it is done in a spirit of sacrifice and worship. It is in this extended sense that it is used in the word Brahmayagna and in the most extended sense we have it in Gnanayagna. If we have this extended meaning of the word yagna in mind, the five mahayagnas can be clearly understood.

*Devayagna* means worship of the gods. *Pitri-yagna* refers to the *tarpana* offered to the forefathers. The *atithiyagna* or *manushya yagna* means food offered to the guests in respectful worship. The *bhritiyayagna* is the maintenance of those dependent on oneself and it includes family servants. If it is done as a duty in a spirit of sacrifice or worship, it becomes *yagna*. The *Atma yagna* otherwise referred to as *Brahmayagna* is the nourishing of one's soul or spirit.

In the sloka the verb *निर्वपति* is used as indicating *यज्ञ* or *यजन* while in the strict sense *निर्वपति* may be appropriate to the *tarpana* of the *pitris*. In its general meaning, it may be used in reference to the other forms of the *yagnas* also.

Both the *Yaksha* and *Dharmaputra* have taken their authority from the sloka 72 in *Adhyaya 2* of the *Manusmriti*. But they have not used the phraseology of verse 70. I think there is some significance in this as they intend that the five duties should be made more general and applicable to all Hindus. While *Brahmayagna* may refer to the study of the *Vedas* only, the reference to *Atma* makes it applicable to all spiritual and religious literature. Instead of *bhritya*, some readings have *bhoota*. *Bhoota* and *bhritya* have more or less the same meaning in this context. *Bhoota* applies to all beings while *bhritya* refers to all those who are to be maintained. It comes to the same nearly as referring to all beings.

This is also further emphasised by the fact that the sage *Valluvar*, in his immortal work in *Tamil*

known as *The Kural*, mentioned the same idea as is contained in verse 72 of *Adhyaya 2* of the *Manusmriti*:

Tenpulattaar daivam virundu  
okkal taan yenrangaimbulattaarum  
ombal talai.

(*Tirukkural*—*Arattupal*—*Adikaram 5*)

[It is the supreme virtue, (of the householder) to fulfil his obligations to these five, namely forefathers, gods, guests, relatives and himself.]

The conception of the *Panchamahayagna* is really a grand and comprehensive one covering the entire gamut of duties of a man in civilised society. While *deva* and *pitriyagnas* refer to beings above him, the *atithiyagna* and *bhootayagna* refer to beings around him and below him. By *atmayagna* is meant the duty to one's higher self, that is the duty of cultivating spirituality and realising the *Brahman* in one's self. There can be no higher or more comprehensive enunciation of the duties of man than those which are denoted by the *Panchamahayagnas*.

Hinduism calls upon every Hindu to fulfil these five duties daily in his life, irrespective of caste or creed. It is this fundamental call of Hinduism that forms the true import of the above question and answer.

### 8 (29)

The next four questions of the *Yaksha* are as follows:—

किंस्विद्गुह्यतरं भूमेः किंस्विदुच्चतरं च खात् ॥  
किंस्विच्छीघ्रतरं वायोः किंस्विदबहुतरं तृणात् ॥



1. Which is weightier than the earth itself?
2. What is higher than the sky?
3. What is swifter than the wind?
4. What is more numerous than grass?

Yudhishtira answered as follows:—

माता गुरुतरा भूमेः खात् पितोच्चतरस्तथा ।

मनः शीघ्रतरं वातात् चिन्ता बहुतरा तृणात् ॥

The mother is weightier than the Earth.

The father is higher than the Sky.

The mind is swifter than the Wind.

Thoughts are more numerous than grass.

It is the earth that sustains and nourishes. When compared to the earth, one's mother sustains and nourishes one much more. Hence she is more precious than even the earth.

On account of rain, the sky is very beneficial. But the father confers greater benefits on his son. Hence he should be considered to be of greater value than even the sky. In fact, the earth and the sky (Dyava and Prithvi) are often compared in the Vedas to one's father and mother. Our great Hindu culture puts paramount value on the devotion to one's parents. This is most brilliantly exemplified in the Ramayana by the unparalleled devotion and obedience of Rama to his father and mother. He says "I shall even fall into the fire if my father says so." Without one word of demur or one thought of unhappiness, Rama went into exile in the forest and thus set an everlasting example to India's sons to follow.

The next two questions and answers are concerned with another fundamental aspect of our culture and religion namely, control of the mind and the senses or self-control and austerity. The Yogasutra of Patanjali describes the first step in yoga as *chittavrittinirodha* or the control of the fluctuations of the mind. In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna said, "the mind is fickle. It is violent, powerful and obstinate. To control it is as difficult, it seems to me, as to control the wind." The Lord answered: "Doubtless, the mind is fickle and hard to curb; but, by constant practice and by detachment or control of the senses it can be curbed." The Yogasutra also refers to the *nirodha* of the mind by constant practice and detachment.

There have been in former times in the Tamil country great saints known as Siddhas who have given expression to their thoughts in simple cryptic songs which have a deeper spiritual significance than the apparent simple meaning. One such Siddhapurusha was Kudambaisiddhar. He has been known by this name, on account of the refrain, *kudambai* occurring frequently in his songs. One of his songs is as follows:—

*Veham adangiye*

*vilangum mai olikku*

*yogamdan edukadi Kudambai*

"Does a realised soul who shines by the control of the force of the mind, need yoga?" What he means by this is the best yoga consists in the control of the mind and forms the sure step to the realisation of Truth.

The next four questions of the Yaksha are as follows:—

किंस्वित् सुप्तं न निमिषति  
किंस्विज्जातं न चोपति।  
कस्यस्विहृदयं नास्ति  
किंस्विद्वेगेन वर्धते ॥

1. What is that which does not close its eyes while asleep?
2. What is that which does not move after birth?
3. What is that which is without heart?
4. What is that which swells by its own force?

Dharmaputra answered as follows:—

मत्स्यः सुप्तो न निमिष-  
त्यण्डं जातं न चोपति।  
अश्मनो हृदयं नास्ति  
नदी वेगेन वर्धते ॥

1. A fish does not close its eyes while asleep.
2. An egg does not move after birth.
3. A stone is without heart.
4. A river swells by the force of its current.

The first question refers to a natural phenomenon in regard to the fish. Even though fishes sleep, their eyes do not close which is not the case with other beings. But there is a deeper spiritual import for both the question and the answer. The word 'matsya' refers to the Jiva. Just like the fish which swims from one bank of a river to the other bank alternately, so the Jiva goes from

the waking state to the dream state and becomes motionless when it goes to its own resting place. Simultaneously the Jiva moves to both these states and finally attains the state where it is oblivious of all sense perceptions and of the working of the mind. But it still shines with self-knowledge or pure consciousness. When explaining the nature of the *purusha* moving from the waking state to the dream state and dreamless state, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad compares the Jiva to a mahamatsya or a big fish. The Upanishad says:

तद्यथा महामत्स्य उभे क्लेशानुसंचरति पूर्वं चापरं च।  
एवमेवायं पुरुष एतावुभावन्तावनुसञ्चरति स्वप्नान्तं च बुद्धान्तं च॥

By this illustration, it is made clear that the body and its organs together with their stimulating causes, desire and work are the attributes of the non-self and the self which is in its so-called transition from the waking state to the dream state and from dream state to the dreamless state is not in the least affected by these attributes of the non-self, but is distinct from them.

The next question and answer also apparently refer to a thing not moving after birth. But in its spiritual import it means that the jiva superimposed by its limiting adjuncts of the body still does not move i.e. it is not affected by them. Due to ignorance, when the body moves the self also is said to move. The word *chopati* is derived from the root 'chipu' which denotes 'slow moving.' In one of his cryptic sayings in Tamil, the sage Tayumanavar asks "when shall I attain the state where, though asleep, I shall be awake and be happy."



*Toongaamal toongi sukham peruvadu ekkaalam?*

The next question and answer must have a deeper significance than a statement that stones are without heart. It does not require a Dharmaputra to make this pronouncement. The word *ashma* has now come in ordinary usage to have the restricted meaning, 'stone.' But its etymological import is that which is without a perishable body. *Shma* in *ashma* means 'the perishable body'. Hence the use of '*shma*' in *shmasana* or burning ground and *smashru* meaning 'whiskers' or 'beard'. Hence *ashma* etymologically means that which has no body. अशरीरं वावसन्तं नः प्रियाप्रिये स्पृशतः says the Upanishad. "A person who is not affected by the body is said to be without a body, i.e. without feelings of attachment or dislike which are the ordinary impulses of the heart."

In the *Ramayana*, bemoaning her lot in the Asoka grove Sita exclaims: "Fortunate are those sages who are free from all impurities of the mind and are without attachment or dislike. In this world, attachment becomes a source of sorrow and dislike breeds fear."

The next question and answer also apparently refer to the natural phenomenon of the swelling of the river by the force of its current. But it has a deeper spiritual significance. Having attained the dreamless state or Samadhi or trance, the jiva is still able to come suddenly to the waking state and imbibe the sense perceptions all around. It is able to do this of its own accord and impulse. The word *nadi* here refers to the flow of consciousness. When this flow takes place, the jiva comes to the waking state and perceives the objects in the world.

10 (37)

The Yaksha asked:

किंस्वित् प्रवसतो मित्रं किंस्विमित्रं गृहे सतः ।  
आतुरस्य च किं मित्रं किंस्विमित्रं मरिष्यतः ॥

*Who is the friend of one who goes on a journey?  
Who is the friend of one who remains at home?  
Who is the friend of one who is afflicted by sickness?  
Who is the friend of one who is about to die?*

Dharmaputra answered:

सार्थः प्रवसतो मित्रं भार्या मित्रं गृहे सतः ।  
आतुरस्य भिषजिमित्रं दानं मित्रं मरिष्यतः ॥

*The caravan is the friend of a person going on a journey.*

*The wife is the friend of the person who remains at home.*

*The physician is the friend of the sick man.*

*Gifts constitute the friend of the person who is about to die.*

The word *pravasa* is generally used to denote a person who goes abroad for the purpose of trade. In ancient days the journey was performed mostly by road and the safest and most convenient way was to go in groups along with other persons who travelled with a similar purpose. *Sartha* means a 'caravan', 'a group of travellers performing a long journey.'

The second question in this *sloka* and the answer to it refer to the Hindu ideal of marriage according to our *sastra*. It is that the husband and wife are one and that they perform together in life-long partnership the several duties, religious and secular, pertaining to the

life of a householder. An important ritual of the marriage ceremony is known as the saptapadi in which the bridegroom makes the bride take seven steps while he utters the following Vedic *mantra*:

सखा सप्तपदा भव । सखायौ सप्तपदा बभूव ।  
 सख्यं ते गमेयम् । सख्या ते मायोषम् ।  
 सख्यान् मे मायोष्ठाः । समयाच, सङ्कल्पावह ।  
 संप्रियौ, रोचिष्णू, सुमनस्यमानौ ।  
 इषमूर्जमभिसंवसानौ । सन्नौ मनोसि ।  
 संव्रता समुचितान्याकरम् ।

'By these seven steps you have become my life-long friend. We have become friends. I shall not deviate from your friendship. May you not deviate from my friendship. We have been united. May we live together. We shall have the same thoughts. We shall love each other. Let us live in joy with bright faces. We shall live together enjoying food and growing strong by its essence. With our minds in unison, we shall perform the same rites together.'

In another *mantra* addressing the bride, the bridegroom says:

मूर्धनि पत्युरारोह । प्रजया च विराड् भव ।  
 संराज्ञी श्वशुरे भव । संराज्ञी श्वश्रुवां भव ।  
 ननांदरि संराज्ञी भव । संराज्ञी अधिदेवषु ।

'Be highly honoured by your husband. Beget ten children. You shall be the queen of your husband's home, over your father-in-law, your mother-in-law, your sister-in-law and your-brothers-in-law. You shall shine in my house in the midst of them all.'

This great ideal has been beautifully expressed also by our classical poets. In the *Raghuvamsa*, canto 8,

Kalidasa speaks to the same effect through King Aja lamenting the death of his wife Indumati:

गृहिणी सचिवः सखी मित्रः प्रियशिष्या ललिते कलाविधौ ।  
 करुणाविमुखेन मृत्युना हरता त्वां वद किं न मे हृतम् ॥

'You were the mistress of my house; you were my wise counsellor and my intimate friend. You were my dear pupil in the fine arts. Alas! by snatching you, what has not Death, so indifferent to pity, taken away!'

Upon separation from Sita, Sri Rama is said to bewail in the same manner in King Bhoja's *Champu-ramayana*:

आघो सिद्धोषधिरिव हिता केलिकाले वयस्या  
 पत्नी त्रेतायजनसमये क्षत्रियाण्येव युद्धे ।  
 शिष्या देवद्विजपितृसमाराधने बन्धुराती  
 सीता सा मे शिशिरितमहाकानने का न जाता ॥

'Sita was the medicine to my mind in its afflictions. She was my playmate in my sporting hours. She stood by me as my *patni* when I was engaged in a sacrifice. She showed me rare courage of a Kshatriya lady when I went to battle. She assisted me with the meticulous care of a pupil to his *guru* in my rites to propitiate the gods, the *dwijas* and my ancestors. When I was sick in body, she nursed me with loving kinship. What has she not done to me in the biting cold of this dense forest!'

Bhavabhuti speaks similarly of Sita in his *Uttara-ramacharita*:

इयं गेहे लक्ष्मीः इयममृतवर्तिर्नयनयोः

'In the home, she is the Goddess Lakshmi Herself, and she is the brush of nectar to the eyes'.



✓ These passages emphasise the equal status of the wife with the husband as his friend, counsellor and partner—in weal and woe. In tune with this ancient dharma, Yudhishtira declares that the truest friend of a householder is his wife.

According to our Dharma it is the gifts that we make in life at the time of death that aid us in our passage to the other world and constitute the punya that will save us there.

(\*) Hence, the *sastras* prescribe that, before a person departs from this world, gifts (*dana*) of land, cow, money and other valuable things should be made. The Puranas, especially the *Garudapurana*, give an account of how these gifts help the departed soul in crossing the *Vaitarani* and other obstacles in its journey to celestial regions. Charity has been extolled as a virtue in all the religions of the world. They declare that it brings fame in this life, and perpetuates the name of the giver in the remembrance of future generation.

### 11 (41)

The Yaksha next asked:—

कोऽतिथिः सर्वभूतानां किंस्विद्धर्मं सनातनम् ।  
अमृतं किंस्विद्राजेन्द्र किंस्वित् सर्वमिदं जगत् ॥

Who is the guest of all creatures?

What is the eternal Dharma?

What, O foremost of Kings, is Amrita?

What is this entire Universe?

Dharmaputra answered:

अतिथिः सर्वभूतानामग्निः सोमो गवामृतम् ।  
सनातनोऽमृतो धर्मा वायुः सर्वमिदं जगत् ॥

Agni is the guest of all creatures.

Soma is the eternal Dharma.

The cow's milk is Amrita.

Vayu is the entire universe.

These questions and the answers to them are not included in the text of *Mahabharata* published by the Bhandarkar Institute, Poona. They are referred to only in the note below as found in other editions. For all creatures Agni is said to be the guest. The word *atithi* अतिथिः in Sanskrit denotes the guest who must be worshipped by hospitable offering of food. Agni is said to be the atithi for all creatures on account of the fact that, according to our Sastras, the offering of cow's milk, clarified butter etc., to the fire conduces to the formation of clouds giving rain. By timely rains grass, cereals and paddy are produced which form the food for animals and men. Hence as the guest of all creatures Agni is the object of worship.

अग्नौ प्रास्ताहुतिः सम्यगादित्यमुपतिष्ठते  
आदित्याज्जायते वृष्टिर्बृष्टेरन्नं ततः प्रजाः

The oblation made in fire reaches the sun. By the sun rain is produced. By rain, food is grown, and by food are creatures born.

In another sense also Agni can be said to be *atithi* for all creatures. Just as a guest consumes food, Agni consumes all creatures and all things in the world.

Neelakanta, the commentator, has interpreted Yudhishtira's answer thus for the first question, 'Who is the guest for all creatures?' He says that the answer of Dharmaputra is 'Agni'. For the next question

किंत्वित् धर्मं सनातनम् 'What is the eternal Dharma?' and for the succeeding question, 'which is the Amrita?', the answer is according to him, in one sentence namely, सोमो गवामृतम् सनातनोऽमृतो धर्मः

He says that the meaning of the sentence is that Soma (Moon-god) is included in the twin-gods अग्नीषोमौ and that Soma is really पयस् or milk of the cow and that milk is offered as *homa* or oblation to the fire. That meritorious act is the eternal and immortal Dharma. According to him 'what is Sanatana-Dharma?' and 'what is Amrita?' are both answered by saying that Soma which is verily milk and which becomes *homa* to the fire, is the eternal Dharma leading to immortality. The difficulty in this interpretation is that while the two questions of the Yaksha appear to denote different matters, such as Sanatana Dharma and Amrita or nectar, the answer combines both of them and nectar is said to be the Dharma leading to immortality. Amrita is taken as an adjective meaning immortal. If the two questions are separate and required separate answers, Yudhishtira's reply may have to be interpreted thus: The question, 'What is Amrita?' is answered as गवामृतम् 'milk of the cow,' and the question 'what is Sanatana Dharma?' is answered by Yudhishtira in the following manner: Soma by which is meant specially the Soma Yaga is the eternal Dharma. We find that yagna is mentioned as one of the forty-eight *samskaras* ordered in the Smṛiti, namely, the seven *haviryagnas* and seven *soma yagnas*. The Śruti declares:

तमेवं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन जनेन  
तपसाऽज्ञाशक्तेन ।

"The Brahmanas or knowers of the Vedas attained the knowledge of Atman by yagna, dana, fasting and tapas." By the performance of yagnas, the purity of the mind is attained and through the purified mind the knowledge of the eternal Atman is realised. Hence here yagna is said to be the eternal Dharma. 'What is nectar?' is answered by saying, 'the milk of the cow.' The word *amrita* is used with गव्य denoting cow's milk. In this interpretation the only possible objection is that the word Soma has to be taken with the words सनातनोऽमृतो धर्मः leaving in the middle the words... गवामृतम्.

According to the ordinary rules of the interpretations of the sentences, the flaw of *dooranvaya* दूरान्वय may be there. But as the answers are in the form of verses, this flaw is not considered to be serious, as arrangements of the words may be varied by the exigencies of the metre.

There is another possible interpretation also which may be suggested, and which will avoid this objection. For the question, 'what is Amrita?', the answer is *soma gavamritam*. (सोमो गवामृतम्) That is, 'soma which is really in the form of cow's milk,' and for the question, 'what is Sanatana Dharma?', the answer is 'that eternal Dharma, which leads to immortality is Sanatana Dharma.' Here too the arrangement of the words in the verse सोमो गवामृतं सनातनोऽमृतो धर्मः is not according to the order of the questions. The answer to the third question, 'What is Amrita?' is put in before the answer to the second question namely, 'what is Sanatana Dharma?' There is authority of the Smṛiti



for regarding soma as पयस् or cow's milk. In the *Yajurveda*, *Taittiriya Samhita*, 2nd Kanda, it is stated as follows—

एतद्वा अग्नेस्तेजो यद्धृतमेतत्सोमस्य यत्पयो  
य एषमग्नीषोमयोस्तेजो वेद तेजस्व्येष भवति ॥

The God Agni is in the form of *ghrita* घृत or clarified butter and Soma (Moon-god) is in the form of cow's milk. He who understands thus the power of Agni and Soma will himself be endowed with *tejas* तेजस् or power. Therefore the answer for the question, 'What is Amrita?' is: 'Soma in the form of cow's milk is Amrita'.

The answer to the fourth question, 'What is this entire universe?', is that 'Vayu is the entire universe', as he pervades the whole universe. Neelakanta quotes the Sruti as authority for this, namely, वायुरेव व्यष्टिः वायुस्समष्टिः Vayu is the single entity or Pin-danda and Vayu as *samashiti* is the whole namely, the Brahmanda. There is also the Upanishadic text referring to the Vayu त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि। नमस्ते वायो Salutations to thee, O Vayu, Thou indeed art the Brahman that appeareth to our perception.'

12 (45)

The Yaksha asked next the following questions:

किंस्विदेको विचरते जातः को जायते पुनः॥  
किंस्विद्विमस्य भेषज्यं किंस्विदावपनं महत् ।

*What is that which journeys alone?*

*What is that which is born again?*

*What is the remedy against snow or fog?*

*What is the large receptacle?*

38

Dharmaputra answers as follows:

सूर्य एको विचरते चन्द्रमा जायते पुनः।  
अग्निहिमस्य भेषज्यं भूमिरावपनं महत् ॥

*The Sun journeys alone.*

*The Moon is reborn.*

*The Fire is the remedy for snow or fog.*

*The Earth is the large receptacle.*

Sri Neelakanta in his commentary gives his philosophical interpretation for these questions and answers and shows the connection with the answer to the last of the previous set of questions, namely, that Vayu is the entire universe. When Vayu disappears the question naturally arises, 'What remains?' Therefore the first question in this set and the answer to it according to him relate to that. Yudhishtira says that Surya, which, as a Jyotis or light, signifies *Atma* which is referred to as *Paramjyotis* in the *Brihadaranyakopanishad*, alone remains, after the phenomenal universe entirely disappears. For, the *Atma* alone shines during the three stages of consciousness, namely, waking, dream and dreamless sleep. The further question arises how the *prapancha* or the phenomenal universe is perceived again.

The answer is based on the Sruti text 'चन्द्रमा मनो भूया' Due to *avidya*, the mind functions and projects the world once again. That is the significance of saying that it is the moon (which is equated with the mind) is born again. This *avidya* produces sorrow. The next question is: What is the remedy for this *avidya* which like the fog is the superimposing agency? The answer is that *agni* is the remedy for snow or fog.

39

In accordance with the Sruti अग्निर्वा भूत्वा the answer is to be understood as saying that the resplendent knowledge of the Mahavakyas Tattvamasi etc., is the remedy for the fog of avidya.

All these four questions and answers which are similar to the four questions and their answers in the Taittiriya Samhita, 7th Kanda:

कस्विदेकाकी चरति क उ स्वज्जायते पुनः ।  
किं स्वद्विमस्य भेषजं किं स्वदावपनं महत् ।  
सूर्य एकाकी चरति चन्द्रमा जायते पुनः ।  
अग्निहिमस्य भेषजं भूमिरावपनं महत् ॥

13 (45)

Yaksha asks the following questions:

किंस्विदेकपदं धर्म्यं किंस्विदेकपदं यशः ।  
किंस्विदेकपदं स्वर्ग्यं किंस्विदेकपदं सुखम् ॥

What is the all-comprehensive virtue?  
What is the all-comprehensive thing of fame?  
What, in one word, leads to Heaven?  
In what is comprised all happiness?

Dharmaputra answers as follows:

दाक्ष्यमेकपदं धर्म्यं दानमेकपदं यशः ।  
सत्यमेकपदं स्वर्ग्यं शीलमेकपदं सुखम् ॥

Integrity is all-comprehensive virtue.  
Dana or charity is the one comprehensive matter of fame.  
Truth alone leads to Heaven.  
Character comprises all happiness.

It is not clear what is meant by the word दाक्ष्यम्. According to Apte's Dictionary, the word दाक्ष्यम् is

stated to mean "honesty or integrity" and also "cleverness or ability." In the present context, the former meaning, "honesty or integrity" is appropriate. In the Amarakosa, the word दक्ष is said to be used in the sense of chatura (चतुर) or patu (पटु) which means ushna (उष्ण) which according to the commentary in the Amarakosa means "capacity to accomplish quickly." Dharmaputra may have meant by the use of the word दाक्ष्य this quality also. Virtuous deeds always demand quick decision and action. The man who hesitates, doubts and delays cannot accomplish righteous acts. It is well-known that one's name is perpetuated by charity alone while everything else about him may be forgotten.

The story of Indradyumna in the Mahabharata, Vana Parva beautifully illustrates this truth. King Indradyumna was for long living in Heaven. His merit exhausted, he dropped from Heaven, crying, "My fame has fallen." He met Markandeya and asked him whether he recognised him. But Markandeya replied in the negative. He then asked Markandeya whether he knew any one more long-lived than Markandeya. He mentioned a baka or crane. Then Indradyumna met the crane. It said "I have heard of Indradyumna. He was a noble man and a charitable king. More than that I do not know. You may ask a tortoise, more aged than myself living in a tank nearby." He came and asked the tortoise. It said, "Don't you know King Indradyumna of blessed memory who did many notable acts of charity? He is was who dug and constructed this tank and I am living in it for thousands of years and it is named after him." As he said so,



his eyes were filled with tears. At this moment, a celestial car came to take him back to Heaven. An aerial voice was heard to say as follows:

दिवं स्पृशति भूमिं च शब्दः पुण्यस्य कर्मणः ।  
यावत् स शब्दो भवति तावत् स्वर्गं महीयते ॥

“The fame of the meritorious act touches Heaven and Earth; so long as that fame remains, it attains glory in Heaven.”

Truth alone leads to Heaven. It is the same thing that is affirmed in the well-known sentence सत्यान्नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

In the Taittiriya Aranyaka, the Veda declares

सत्येन न सुवर्गल्लोकात् व्यचन्ते कदाचन ।

‘Sustained by Truth, they never fall from Heaven.’

In the Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda, sarga 109, Rama says:

धर्मः सत्यपरो लोके मूलं सर्वस्य चोच्यते ।  
सत्यमेवेश्वरो लोके सत्ये धर्मः सदाश्रितः ॥  
सत्यमूलानि सर्वाणि सत्यान्नास्ति परं पदम् ।  
दत्तमिष्टं हृतं चैव तप्तानि च तपांसि च ॥  
वेदाः सत्यप्रतिष्ठानास्तस्मात्सत्यपरो भवेत् ॥

Character is the best way to happiness. The following sloka of Bhartrhari illustrates this:

ऐश्वर्यस्य विभूषणं सुजनता शौर्यस्य वाक्संयमो  
ज्ञानस्योपशमः श्रुतस्य विनयो वित्तस्य पात्रे व्ययः ।  
अक्रोधस्तपसः क्षमा प्रभवितुर्धर्मस्य निर्व्यजिता  
सर्वेषामपि सर्वकारणमिदं शीलं परं भूषणम् ॥

Goodness is the ornament for rulership, restraint in speech for heroism, tranquillity of mind for wisdom,

humility for learning, gift to the deserving for riches, absence of anger for tapas, patience for the powerful and sincerity for Dharma. Character is the foremost foundation for all these.

## 14 (53)

The next questions of the Yaksha are as follows:—

किंस्विदात्मा मनुष्यस्य किंस्विदेवकृतः सखा ।  
उपजीवनं किंस्विदस्य किंस्विदस्य परायणम् ॥

What is the soul of a person?

Which is the friend bestowed by divinity?

What is it that aids to sustain him?

What is his greatest resort?

Dharmaputra answers as follows:—

पुत्र आत्मा मनुष्यस्य भार्या देवकृतः सखा ।  
उपजीवनं च पर्जन्यो दानमस्य परायणम् ॥

The son is the man's soul.

The wife is a friend bestowed by divinity.

Rain is the chief aid to life.

Charity is the great resort.

One's own soul goes by the name of son, says the Veda. आत्मा वै पुत्रनामासि ।

It is by the grace of God that a man gets his wife as his companion or partner. Hence it is man's duty to treat his wife well looking upon her as the gift of God to him. Manu says:

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः

‘Where women are adored there the Devatas are gratified.’ The rain is our chief aid for life as produc-

tion of food depends chiefly upon rain. Charity is certainly the best resort of all good men.

15 (57)

Yaksha asked then

धन्यानामुत्तमं किंस्विद् धनानां स्यात् किमुत्तमम् ।

लाभानामुत्तमं किं स्यात् सुखानां स्यात्किमुत्तमम् ॥

*What is the best among laudable things?*

*What is the best among all assets?*

*What is the best of all gains?*

*What is the foremost happiness?*

Dharmaputra answered:

धन्यानामुत्तमं दाक्ष्यं धनानामुत्तमं श्रुतम् ।

लाभानां श्रेय आरोग्यं सुखानां तुष्टिस्तमा ॥

*Integrity is the best among laudable things.*

*Learning is the best asset.*

*Health is the foremost among gains.*

*Contentment is the best happiness.*

We have already stated the exact meaning of the word दाक्ष्य namely, integrity, in answer to the question किंस्वित् एकपदं धर्म्यम् ?

Dharmaputra uses the word दाक्ष्य in this sense. Therein we referred to two meanings of the word Dakshya, one given in Apte's Dictionary and the other suggested by the Amarakosa. Here the meaning suggested by Apte namely, honesty, is more appropriate.

It is the wisdom derived from learning that is the real wealth. In explaining the *Upanishadvakya* ततो मे श्रियमावह (Sikshavalli 4th Anuvaka) Sankara in his

Bhashya says तां, ततः मेधानिर्वर्तनात्परं आवह आनय; अमेघसो हि शीरनर्थायैवेति ।

'after the acquisition of *medha* or wisdom,' and he adds 'the wealth of those without wisdom is of no use.' Hence the prayer in the Upanishad समेन्द्रो मेघया स्पृणोतु 'May Indra endow me with the power of wisdom,' and it is after that that the prayer is made for wealth. We realise, therefore, that Dharmaputra rightly emphasised that श्रुतम् meaning learning, by which wisdom is attained, is the best among one's assets.

The significances of the answers that 'health is the foremost among gains' and 'contentment is the best happiness' are so obvious that they do not need to be explained at length.

16 (61)

The Yaksha asked:

कश्च धर्मः परो लोके कश्च धर्मः सदाफलः ।

किं नियम्य न शोचन्ति कश्च सन्धिर्न जीयते ॥

*What is the highest Dharma in the world?*

*What is that Dharma which always bears fruit?*

*What is that by controlling which people never grieve?*

*With whom does an alliance never break?*

Dharmaputra answered:

आनृशंस्यं परो धर्मस्त्रयी धर्मः सदाफलः ।

मनो यम्य न शोचन्ति सन्धिः सद्भिर्न जीयते ॥

*The highest Dharma is kindness to all.*

*The Dharma ordained by the Vedas always bears fruit.*



*By controlling the mind, people never grieve.  
Association with the good never breaks.*

Neelakanta, the commentator, who in addition gives the philosophical meanings for these slokas, says "By आनुशंस्यं is meant non-injury to all beings and, that being the characteristic vow of the *sannyasasrama*, he concludes that by आनुशंस्य is meant here *sannyasa*. According to him, Yudhishtira says that *sannyasa* is the highest Dharma in the world. Pursuing the same line of interpretation, he explains त्रयीधर्म as Pranava Upasana or the meditation on the Pranava or Om. He refers to the Sruti authority, namely, मोक्षमन्त्रः त्रयी इति and thus says त्रयीधर्म means the meditation on the Om in its parts of अ, उ and म्. The अ stands for Sthula or the material body, the उ stands for the Sukshma or the subtle body, and म् stands for the Karna sarira or casual body. By the process of identifying the Sthula, the material body, with the Sukshma (the subtle body) and with Karana sarira (causal body) and merging all the three in the half *matra* or the half sound measure in the म् sound, the mediator attains the fourth pure Brahma state, ब्रह्मण्य भाव ।

When a person attains that stage by meditation he attains Moksha, which is everlasting. Similarly, in regard to the third answer of Dharmaputra, namely, by controlling the mind a person never experiences sorrow, Neelakanta says that Yudhishtira declares that the control of the mind leads to the realisation of the Atman and the realisation of the Atman enables one to transcend sorrow. तरति शोकमात्मचित् says the *Chandogyo-*

*panishad* (he who realises the Atman transcends sorrow) (the *Sanatkumara-Narada Samvada* of the *Chandogyopanishad*). This path to the realisation of the Atman one gets to know by association with a good man, who will initiate him into the path.

17 (65)

The next four questions of the Yaksha are:

किं नु हित्वा प्रियो भवति किं नु हित्वा न शोचति ।  
किं नु हित्वाऽर्थवान् भवति किं नु हित्वा सुखी भवेत् ॥

*By renouncing which thing does one become lovable?*

*By renouncing which thing does one never suffer grief?*

*By renouncing which thing does one become wealthy?*

*By renouncing which thing does one become happy?*

Yudhishtira answers as follow:

मानं हित्वा प्रियो भवति क्रोधं हित्वा न शोचति ।  
कामं हित्वाऽर्थवान् भवति लोभं हित्वा सुखी भवेत् ।

*By renouncing pride one becomes lovable.*

*By renouncing anger one never experiences grief.*

*By renouncing desire one becomes wealthy.*

*By renouncing avarice one becomes happy.*

Neelakanta's interpretation is that the renunciation of the four, namely, Pride, Anger, Desire and Avarice, enables one to control the mind and, as already pointed out by him in his commentary on the previous sloka,

the control of the mind leads to realisation of the Atman.

Manas is otherwise called also ahamkara. The Gita declares:

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निस्पृहः ।  
निर्मेमो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥  
एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।  
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥

He who renounces all desires and conducts himself without avarice and is devoid of selfishness and ahamkara attains peace. This is the Brahmic state, oh! Partha, and, on attaining it, nobody experiences delusion. Having remained in that state, at the end of his time he attains the absolute Brahman.

### 18 (69)

The next questions of the Yaksha are as follows:

किमर्थं ब्राह्मणे दानं किमर्थं नटनतंके ।  
किमर्थं चैव भृत्येषु किमर्थं चैव राजसु ॥

What for does one make gifts to the Brahmins?  
What for does one make gifts to actors and dancers?  
What for does one give presents to servants?  
What for does one give to kings?

Yudhishtira answered:

धर्मार्थं ब्राह्मणे दानं यशोर्थं नटनतंके ।  
भृत्येषु भरणार्थं वै भयार्थं चैव राजसु ॥

It is for Dharma that one gives to Brahmins.  
It is for fame that one gives to actors and dancers.  
It is for maintaining them that one gives to servants.

It is on account of fear that one gives to kings.

For the performance of all rites and rituals, the recitation of mantras by persons who have knowledge of the Veda is necessary. By making gifts to such persons, the *yajamana* or householder is enabled to perform these rites and rituals in an efficient and effective manner. Hence for every yagna, *dakshina* is necessary for the *Ritviks*. In all other domestic rites, gifts and hospitality to the reciters of the Veda are necessary adjuncts. Hence Dharmaputra says that, for the proper observance of Dharma, gifts to Brahmins are useful.

By the patronage of the Fine Arts, one attains great popularity. This is so even at the present day. The gifts to dependents are a great service to society and it is the duty of every one to see that there is no discontent among one's dependents. That one has to give his dues to the king so as to avoid coercive processes is also very clear. It is not often that such dues are paid voluntarily. The element of fear of the consequences of nonpayment is always there. Whether it is the king in olden days or the Government in the present day, it makes no difference in this matter. Dharmaputra has, therefore, stated that on account of fear of consequences gifts are made to the king.

### 19 (73)

The next questions of the Yaksha are:

केन स्थिदावृतो लोकः केन स्थिन्न प्रकाशते ।  
केन त्यजति मित्राणि केन स्वर्गं न गच्छति ॥

By what is the world enveloped?

On account of what is it that a thing does not shine?



*For what reason does one give up friends?  
For what reason is it that one does not go to heaven?*

Yudhishtira answered:

अज्ञानेनावृतो लोकस्तमसा न प्रकाशते ।  
लोभात्त्यजति मित्राणि सङ्गात् स्वर्गं न गच्छति ॥

*The world is enveloped by ignorance.*

*It is on account of darkness that things do not shine.*

*It is due to avarice that friends are abandoned.*

*On account of attachment one does not go to heaven.*

The Lord says in the Gita:

अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः ।

It is on account of ignorance or avidya that man suffers from delusion and is unable to attain the knowledge of reality. It is by the *avarana* and *vikshepa sakti* of avidya (the concealment of the real and the projection of the false) that the soul is prevented from the true perception of the Paramatman and gets involved in the endless cycle of samsara. The self-luminous Atma does not shine on account of the veil of darkness that surrounds it. It is attachment to things of the world that is the cause of delusion and suffering and that prevents one's attainment of heaven.

How sanga or attachment prevents the attainment of Heaven is clearly demonstrated by the Lord in the Gita in the following verses:—

ध्यायतो विषयान्मुंसः सङ्गास्तेषूपजायते ।  
सङ्गात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥  
क्रोधाद्भवति संमोहः संमोहा स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।  
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥

“Constantly thinking of the objects of the senses arouses attachment in a person. From attachment is born desire, and from desire is produced anger. From anger arises delusion. By delusion is caused the loss of remembrance, and by the loss of remembrance is produced the extinction of intellect, and by the extinction of intellect everything is lost.”

## 20 (77)

The Yaksha next asks the following questions:

मृतः कथं स्यात् पुरुषः कथं राष्ट्रं मृतं भवेत् ।  
आहुं मृतं कथं वा स्यात् कथं यज्ञो मृतो भवेत् ॥

*How will one be considered as dead?*

*When will a Kingdom be considered as dead?*

*When will a Sraddha be considered as dead?*

*When will a sacrifice, Yagna be considered as dead?*

Yudhishtira replies thus:

मृतो दरिद्रः पुरुषो मृतं राष्ट्रमराजकम् ।  
मृतमश्रोत्रियं आहुं मृतो यज्ञस्त्वदक्षिणः ॥

*A person stricken with poverty may be considered as dead.*

*A country without a government may be considered as dead.*

*A sraddha performed without men learned in the Vedas may be considered as dead.*

*A yagna (sacrifice) without dakshina or remuneration to the ritviks may be considered as dead.*

Neelakanta in his commentary interprets the word daridra to mean a person who, though possessing riches, still will not spend or give i.e. a miser—such a person will be of no help to society. A country without a sovereign or government will greatly suffer from anarchy. No trade or other peaceful activity or prosperity will be found there. Hence Dharmaputra says that a country in the above conditions may be considered as practically dead. The condition of the people in a country without a sovereign or sovereign government is forcefully depicted in the Ramayana, Ayodhyakanda, 67th Sarga. The Slokas which begin with the words नाराजके जनपदे describe the deplorable conditions of the citizens in such a country. In a country without the sovereign, says Valmiki, there will be no rain, and there will be no sowing of seeds in the land and the people will be in distress. In this way there is a powerful picture given of anarchy that prevails in society, in all departments of activity and the description ends with the following stanza:

अहो तम इवेदं स्यान्न प्रज्ञायेत किंचन ।  
राजा चेन्न भवेत्लोके विभजन्साध्वसाधुनी ॥

“O! There will be darkness here. Nothing will be known, if there is no sovereign in the world discriminating between right and wrong.” Now-a-days instead of ‘sovereign’, we will have to say “a stable government.” We can well realise the truth of this when we consider the political situation in Laos and Congo.

A sraddha ceremony performed for one's ancestors is said to be properly done and will have religious efficacy in propitiating the pithrs, only when people learned in the Vedas are invited to officiate in the sraddha in the place of Visvedevas, Pithr Pithamaha, Prapithamahs and Vishnu.

Persons devoid of Veda-adhyayana are unfit to officiate in the sraddha ceremony. This is clearly laid down by Manu in the 3rd Adhyaya, 168th sloka:

ब्राह्मणस्त्वनधीयानस्तृणाग्निरिव शाम्यति ।  
तस्मै हव्यं न दातव्यं न हि भस्मनि हूयते ॥

‘The person who is not learned in Vedas or who has not studied the Vedas is like grass in a fire, extinct soon. To him the havya should not be given because in ashes no homa can be done.’

There can be no yagna without the ritviks and it is necessary that the ritviks should be given proper remuneration. This remuneration in yagna is called Dakshina. Without such remuneration the mantras which have to be meticulously pronounced and intoned will not have the desired effect and, in order to make the ritviks do this efficiently, they should be properly rewarded.

In the Sabdakalpadruma, the word Dakshina is derived thus:

दक्षते इति दक्षिणा

The verb Daksha means *vriddhi* or increase of efficacy and it is considered as *yagnapatni* or wife of yagna. The following Vedic text is authority for this statement:

यज्ञो गन्धर्वस्तस्य दक्षिणा अप्सरसः



This idea has been woven into poetry by Kalidasa in his *Raghuvamsa*:

तस्य दाक्षिण्यरूढेन नाम्ना मगधवंशजा ।  
पत्नी सुदक्षिणेत्यासीदध्वरस्येव दक्षिणा ॥

"Born in the Maghada family, his wife was known as Sudakshina by this well-known appellation of Dakshinya just as Dakshina is of the Yagna." In this sloka, the poet has referred to the different meanings of the word 'Dakshina' when applied to the king's wife Sudakshina and when used in connection with yagna. It has then the meaning which has been above referred to, namely, increase of efficacy.

दक्षते वर्धते

This is also based upon a Vedic text.

तेऽदक्षन्त दक्षिणां प्रतिगृह्य

"Receiving the Dakshina they increase in efficacy." From all these references, it will be clear that without the Dakshina the yagna may be considered as practically useless.

## 21 (80)

The Yaksha further asks as follows:

का दिक्किमुदकं प्रोक्तं किमन्नं किंच वै विषम् ।  
आदस्य कालमास्थाहि ततः पिब हरस्व च ॥

*What constitutes the way?*

*What has been spoken of as water?*

*What is food? and*

*What is poison?*

*Tell me what is the proper time for Sraddha?*  
*Then drink and take away water.*

Dharmaputra answered thus:

सन्तो विरजलमाकाशं गौरन्नं प्रार्थना विषम् ।  
आदस्य ब्राह्मणः कालः कथं वा यक्ष मन्यसे ॥

*The way is the good.*

*Akasa or space is spoken of as water.*

*The cow is mentioned as food.*

*Wants are poison.*

*Meeting a man learned in the Veda is the proper time for Sraddha.*

*What do you think?*

Neelakanta interprets the word Dik as:

विशति उपदिशतीति दिक् । उपदेष्टार इत्यर्थः

namely, those who instruct. It really meant those who show the way. In the Mahabharata Vanaparva there is a sloka:

वेदा विभिन्ना स्मृतयो विभिन्ना नासौ मुनिर्यस्य मतं न भिन्नम् ।  
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ॥

"The Vedas are diverse. The smritis are different. There is no sage whose view is not different from that of another. The principle of Dharma is concealed in the innermost recess. What the good have followed, is the way." This sloka shows the truth of the statement of Yudhishtira that the way is shown by the good. What is spoken of as water in the Vedas and Upanishads, treating about cosmogony or creation is really Akasa or space.

Referring to the statement in the *Chandogyopanishad*, 5th Adhyaya, 3rd Khanda:

पञ्चम्यां आहुती आपः पुरुषयसो भवति

Sri Neelakanta in his commentary explains that in the fifth आहुति or sacrificial offering आपः or the element water becomes a Purusha or man. Hence he says that the word जल here, according to the Upanishadic interpretation, denotes the phenomenal existence consisting of the individual and universe 'Pinda-Brahmanda.'

Philosophically it denotes the Jiva. The word Akasa is taken, according to the interpretation in the *Brahmasutra*: आकाशस्तल्लिङ्गात् and the Upanishadic text:

सर्वाणि ह्येव इमानि भूतानि आकाशादेव  
समुत्पद्यन्ते आकाशं प्रत्यस्तं यन्ति

to denote the Brahma and not भूताकाश.

Hence Neelakanta concludes that by stating that the जल in question is Akasa, Yudhishtira is enunciating the well-known truth of Advaita, namely, oneness of the Jiva and Brahman, which is the knowledge that is attained by the meditation of the Mahavakya तत्त्वमसि adopting the principles illustrated by the sentence *Soyam devadattah*.

In the next answer, गौरश्च is interpreted by Neelakanta as referring to the senses deriving the meaning thus: गच्छतीति गौः इन्द्रियम्

By Anna is meant that which should be eaten. Therefore he takes it that the objects of the senses have to be entirely merged with the senses themselves, thereby destroying sense attraction altogether. By Prarthana is meant Kama or desire and that is con-

sidered to be विष or poison as it is the cause of the cycle of births and deaths.

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।  
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥

(Bhagavad Gita III-37)

The काम and क्रोध are considered in the *Gita* to be man's chief enemies and they should be conquered before one could attain the realisation of Brahman and the cessation of samsara.

आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणा ।  
कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥

"Know that काम and क्रोध born out of the रजोगुण are the two enemies. They are great devourers and producers of sin."

The proper time for the performance of Sraaddha is when you get a suitable man, learned in the Vedas. It has been explained already that the efficacy of Sraaddha ceremony consists in the proper observance of ritual and the utterances of the mantras in the strict ordained manner. Only a man learned in the Vedas and having complete knowledge of the ceremony or ritual can officiate in it.

22 (84)

The next four questions put by the Yaksha are as follows:

तपः किलक्षणं प्रोक्तं को दमश्च प्रकीर्तितः ।  
क्षमा च का परा प्रोक्ता का च ह्रीः परिकीर्तिता ॥



What is spoken of as the characteristic of Tapas?  
 What is known as Dama or self-control?  
 What is said to be the highest patience?  
 What is well-known as Hree or shame?

The answers of Dharmaputra are:

तपः स्वधर्मवर्तित्वं मनसो दमनं दमः ।  
 क्षमा द्वन्द्वसहिष्णुत्वं ह्रीरकार्यनिवर्तनम् ॥

*Tapas consists in the observance of one's own Dharma.*

*The control of the mind is Dama.*

*Patience is putting up with the dvandvas or the pairs of opposites.*

*Shame is what restrains one from bad conduct.*

The principle of Swadharma has been very well explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is one of the cardinal principles of our Sanatana Dharma. Every person has his duties and suited to his status in society. The doctrine of the observance of the duties of Swadharma is greatly emphasised in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ।

'Even if one suffers destruction in his own Dharma, it is well for him, but the Dharma of another imports fear.' That is why Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* that for the Kshatriya nothing is better than fighting in a virtuous battle.

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यः क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥

Adopting the same principle, Dharmaputra says that the observance of one's duty is Tapas. The con-

trol of the mind is emphasised as an absolutely essential qualification for the study of Vedanta and the pursuit of the knowledge of the Atman. यम, control of the mind, is differentiated from शम, which means शान्ति—cessation of all activities.

The pairs of opposites are शीत and उष्ण; सुख and दुःख; मान and अपमान. The keeping of equilibrium unaffected either by cold or heat, happiness or sorrow, honour or disrespect is spoken of as *dvandva-sahishnutva*. The *Bhagavad Gita* frequently emphasises the duty of persons to remain unaffected by these dvandvas. It refers to this in many contexts. In Adhyaya II-45 the Lord asks Arjuna to be निर्वन्द्व without being affected by the dvandvas.

निर्वन्द्वो भवार्जुन ।  
 निर्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो नियोगक्षेम आत्मवान् ।

In the fifth Adhyaya, Sloka 3,

निर्वन्द्वो हि महाबाहो सुखं बन्धाः प्रमुच्यते ।

"Getting rid of the dvandvas, the person easily gets freed of his बन्ध or fetters." Again in VII-28 ते द्वन्द्वमोहनिर्मुक्ता भजन्ते मां दृढव्रताः ।

"Steadfast in their wills, they are devoted to Me devoid of the delusion of the dvandvas." In XVth Adhyaya 5th Sloka also द्वन्द्वविमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैर्गच्छन्त्यमृताः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥

The feeling of shame in doing a wrong successfully prevents a man from doing it. In the *Gita* ह्रीः (shame) is mentioned as one of the qualities constituting

the देवीसंपत् divine attributes; दया भूतेष्वलोलुप्त्वं मार्दवं  
ह्रीरचापलम् ।

### 23 and 24 (92)

The Yaksha further asks the following questions:

किं ज्ञानं प्रोच्यते राजन् कः शमश्च प्रकीर्तितः ।  
दया च का परा प्रोक्ता किञ्चार्जवमुदाहृतम् ॥  
कः शत्रुर्दुर्जयः पुंसां कश्च व्याधिरनन्तकः ।  
कीदृशश्च स्मृतः साधुरसाधुः कीदृशः स्मृतः ॥

*What, O king, is said to be knowledge?  
What is the highest compassion?  
What is referred to as straightforwardness?  
Who is the foe invincible to man?  
What are the endless desires?  
What is said to be goodness? and  
What is said to be badness?*

Dharmaputra replies as follows:

ज्ञानं तत्त्वार्थं न बोधः शमश्चित्तप्रशान्तता ।  
दया सर्वसुखेष्टित्वाज्जवं समचित्तता ॥  
क्रोधः सुदुर्जयः शत्रुर्लोभो व्याधिरनन्तकः ।  
सर्वभूतहितः साधु साधुर्निदयः स्मृतः ॥

*Knowledge is the perception of the Truth.  
Sama consists in the tranquillity of the mind.  
Compassion consists in desiring happiness to all.  
Straightforwardness is equality of mind towards all.  
Anger is the most invincible foe.  
Covetousness is the endless desire.  
Goodness is seeking the welfare of all beings, and  
Badness is absence of compassion.*

### 25 (96)

The next questions of the Yaksha are as follows:

को मोहः प्रोच्यते राजन् कश्च मानः प्रकीर्तितः ।  
किमालस्यं च विज्ञेयं कश्च शोकः प्रकीर्तितः ॥

*What, O king, is delusion?  
What is pride?  
What is to be understood by laziness?  
What has been spoken of as शोक or grief?*

Dharmaputra answers as follows:

मोहो हि धर्ममूढत्वं मानस्त्वात्माभिमानिता ।  
धर्मनिष्क्रियताऽऽलस्यं शोकस्त्वज्ञानमुच्यते ॥

*Delusion consists in not knowing Dharma.  
Pride is self-consciousness.  
Laziness consists in not doing Dharma.  
Ajnana is spoken of as grief.*

Here *ajnana* is used in the philosophical sense of ignorance of the Absolute Reality, that which is brought about by *Maya* or *Adhyasa*, superimposition, and it is this that brings about sorrow in the world. The Upanishadic text says that he who has the knowledge of the Atman crosses sorrow. “तरति शोकं आत्मवित्”

### 26 (100)

The Yaksha then asked:

किं स्थैर्यमृषिभिः प्रोक्तं किं च धैर्यमुदाहृतम्  
स्नानं च किं परं प्रोक्तं दानं च किमिहोच्यते ।

*What is the steadfastness spoken of by the Rishis?  
What is referred to as courage?*



What is the supreme bath?

What is here said to be Dana or charity?

Dharmaputra answers as follows:

स्वधर्मे स्थिरता स्थैर्यं धैर्यमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः।  
स्नानं मनोमलत्यागो दानं वै भूतरक्षणम् ॥

Not swerving from one's own duties of Swadharma is the steadfastness.

Courage is the control of the senses.

Bath is abandoning of the impurities of the mind.

Protecting all beings is charity.

Steadfastness is a general word meaning steadfastness in all purposes. Yudhishtira restricts its application to the steadfastness in observing Swadharma, thereby extolling it as the highest steadfastness which is specially mentioned by the *rishis*. Courage here does not mean physical courage. But Yudhishtira refers to moral courage in not yielding to temptation. Bath in the physical sense is washing the impurity of the body. But Dharmaputra uses it in the moral sense of washing the impurity of the mind. The *Gita* when mentioning the divine qualities includes शौच and Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary says that शौच is of two kinds—external and internal. External cleanliness consists in the washing away of dust by bath and the internal cleanliness consists in मनो बुद्धयो नैर्मल्यम् purity of the mind and the intellect. The word Dana is not used merely in the sense of gift of money, but it is used by Dharmaputra in the extended sense of service and protection to all beings. In the same sense the word charity is used in the Bible in St. Paul's

Epistle and by the *Brihadaranyakopanishad* when mentioning the three words—"दमो दानं दया" (५-२)

There the story is related of the *devas*, *asuras* and men, approaching their creator Prajapati and asking him for a message. Prajapati replied by uttering the sound 'द' and the *devas* understood it as दाम्यत or control yourself. The *manushyas* similarly asked him and again he gave the message 'द' which they understood as दत्त or give. Similarly the *asuras* are given the message 'द' and they understood it as दयध्वं, be compassionate.

Sri Sankara in his commentary on the above text of the story makes the significant remark that all the three दम दान दया are messages to humanity as persons having the qualities of *deva* and *asura* are also to be found among men. Here the word दान is used in the sense of charity to all, thereby meaning kindness and protection to all beings.

The opposite of all these three qualities is mentioned in the *Gita*:

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत्

(*Gita* XVI-21)

By लोभ is meant selfishness and averseness which make one unmindful of his duty to be kind and to protect all.

26

The further questions of the Yaksha are as follows:

कः पण्डितः पुमान् ज्ञेयो नास्तिकः कश्च उच्यते।

को मूर्खः कश्च कामः स्यात् को मत्सर इति स्मृतः॥

Which man should be regarded as learned?  
Who is said to be a *naasthika* (or atheist)?  
Who is a fool? What is desire? What is envy?

Dharmaputra's answers for these questions are as follows:

धर्मज्ञः पण्डितो ज्ञेयो नास्तिको मूर्ख उच्यते ।

कामः संसारहेतुश्च हतापो मत्सरः स्मृतः ॥

*One who knows Dharma is known as learned.*

*The atheist is called a fool.*

*Desire is the source of samsara or cycle of birth and death.*

*Affliction of the heart is said to be envy.*

It may be noted that five questions are asked and Dharmaputra gives four answers. For the questions, who is an atheist and who is a fool, a common answer is given to both of them, namely, that atheists are fools. That is, for the question 'who is an atheist?' the answer of Dharmaputra is a 'fool', and for the question 'who is a fool?' the answer is 'an atheist.'

The import of the answer of Dharmaputra is that the words fool and atheist are synonymous. They convey the same meaning. The expression *Naasthika* has a special connotation in Sanskrit. It is derived by adding the *thaddhita pratyaya* suffix ठक् to the word नास्ति. *Naasthi* means 'does not exist.' Naturally the question arises: what does not exist? The *Siddhanta Koumudi* in its commentary says 'the परलोक or the world beyond does not exist.' The *pratyaya* is added to denote the person's opinion or conviction. Hence there is a special *sutra* of Panini for the derivation of

the word नास्तिकः अस्ति नास्ति विष्टं मतिः. It is in the sense of a person's belief or conviction that there is a world above that this word is used. Therefore he who believes in a world above is called an *aastika*, (आस्तिक.) He who believes that this material world alone exists and there is no higher region is called a *naasthika* (नास्तिक) in Sanskrit.

It follows also that he does not believe in the existence of the Supreme Spirit or God. So a *naasthika* may be said to be, in modern language, a materialist and Dharmaputra also says that a materialist is a fool: i.e., one who is quite ignorant of the reality behind the Universe. Naturally therefore he considers that a fool is a person who does not believe in the existence of God or a higher world as he does not possess that supreme knowledge, namely, the knowledge of God or the reality behind the Universe.

Yudhishtira explains what is desire in philosophic language as *vasana* वासना. Every thought or desire produces an impression in the mind and the frequent yearning for the object of the desire intensifies it till it becomes so great that it remains a lasting impression even after death. It follows the soul when it incarnates in a fresh body and then these impressions lie imbedded in a subconscious level and become fresh sources of action for the individual in this fresh body. In that state they are said to be *vasanas*. Therefore it is that Dharmaputra says that *Kama* is the source for the cycle of birth and death.

Dharmaputra also explains the psychology of envy. When a person is afflicted in heart on seeing



*Dharma, Artha and Kama are opposed to one another. How do these eternal antagonists co-exist in one place?*

Yudhishtira answered:

यदा धर्मश्च भार्या च परस्परवशानुगौ ।  
तदा धर्मार्थकामानां त्रयाणामपि सङ्गमः ॥

*When a wife and virtue agree with each other and are in control, each of the other, then there is co-existence of the three, namely, Dharma, Artha and Kama.*

This time the Yaksha asks one question instead of four or five, perhaps because it is a very important matter in his opinion. If the wife heartily assists the husband in the pursuit of the three objectives of life, namely, the observance of Dharma, acquiring wealth and the fulfilment of one's legitimate desires, these three contradictories may co-exist. The wife is regarded as the main instrument for the realisation of the above three objectives.

The same idea is beautifully expressed by Valmiki in the *Ramayana* in the following verse put in the mouth of Rama:

धर्मार्थकामाः किल तात लोके समीक्षिता धर्मफलोदयेषु ।  
ये तत्र सर्वे स्युरसंशयं मे भार्येव वक्ष्या अभिमता सुपुत्रा ॥

Valmiki here says that for the attainment of the fruits of Dharma, the pursuit of Dharma, Artha and Kama are regarded as helpful. Undoubtedly all the three exist in his opinion when the wife is obedient, acceptable and endowed with a good son.

The next question of the Yaksha runs as follows:

अक्षयो नरकः केन प्राप्यते भरतर्षभ ।  
एतन्मे पृच्छतः प्रश्नं तच्छीघ्रं वक्तुमर्हसि ॥

*By whom, O! the most excellent among the Bharatha race, is ever-lasting hell attained? Answer this question quickly.*

Evidently the Yaksha feels that he is asking many questions and delaying compliance with the request of Dharmaputra to perform his *sandhya* and to drink water.

Dharmaputra answers as follows:

ब्राह्मणं स्वयमाहूय याचमानमर्कचनम् ।  
पश्चात्तास्तीति यो ब्रूयात् सोऽक्षयं नरकं व्रजेत् ॥  
वेदेषु धर्मशास्त्रेषु मिथ्या यो वै द्विजातिषु ।  
देवेषु पितृधर्मेषु सोऽक्षयं नरकं व्रजेत् ॥  
विद्यामाने धने लोभात् दानभोगविचर्जितः ।  
पश्चात्तास्तीति यो ब्रूयात् सोऽक्षयं नरकं व्रजेत् ।

*He who voluntarily invites a poor Brahmin, who comes for help and then says 'no' to him goes to everlasting hell. He who ascribes falsehood to the Vedas, Dharmasastras, to the Brahmins, to the Devas and to the rites done to Pitrs goes to everlasting hell. He who possesses wealth, yet is devoid of charity or enjoyment owing to avarice and afterwards says 'no', attains everlasting hell.*

The meaning is very clear. A person who invites a poor, innocent learned man, who, for the sake of the study of the Veda, leads a life of poverty and then says 'no' to him is condemned to everlasting hell. In

the ancient days it was felt that society owed a duty to that section of it which imposed on itself poverty for the sake of leading an austere life ever devoted to the study of the Vedas. Hence, a person who neglects the duty of providing for such persons is guilty of an unsocial act which is strongly condemned. Dharmaputra also condemns those persons who have no belief in the truth and validity of the Vedas and the Dharmasastras and who do not believe in the existence of Devas and in one's duty to ancestors. He also condemns men who, though having the means enough to help others and to still enjoy their life, yet, on account of cupidity, never give to others but lead a miserly life.

30

The next question of the Yaksha is:

राजन् कुलेन वृत्तेन स्वाध्यायेन श्रुतेन वा ।  
ब्राह्मण्यं केन भवति प्रब्रूह्येतत् सुनिश्चितम् ॥

*O! King! by what, does Brahminhood result. Is it by kula or ancestry, vritta or conduct, swadhyaya or study of the Vedas, or sruta, hearing or culture? Tell me definitely.*

The answer of Dharmaputra is as follows:

भृशु यक्ष कुलं तात नस्वाध्यायो न च श्रुतम् ।  
कारणं हि द्विजत्वे च वृत्तमेव न संशयः ॥  
वृत्तं यत्नेन संरक्ष्यं ब्राह्मणेन विशेषतः ।  
अक्षीणवृत्तो न क्षीणो वृत्तस्तु हतो हतः ॥  
पठकाः पाठकाश्चैव ये चान्ये शास्त्रचिन्तकाः ।  
सर्वे व्यसनिनो मूर्खा यः क्रियावान् स पण्डितः ॥  
चतुर्वेदोऽपि दुर्वृत्तः स शूद्रादतिरिच्यते ।  
योऽग्निहोत्रपरो दान्तः स ब्राह्मण इति स्मृतः ॥

70

—Listen, O! Respected Yaksha, it is not ancestry or study or learning of Veda, or hearing or culture that is the cause of Brahminhood. Without doubt it is conduct that is the cause of Brahminhood. One's conduct should always be well protected especially by a Brahmin. He who keeps his conduct unsullied never goes down. He, however, whose conduct is destroyed is himself destroyed. The teachers and pupils and all who merely study the sastras are to be regarded as fools. But he alone who possesses conduct is the man of real knowledge. Even he who has studied the four Vedas is to be regarded as inferior to the unlearned man if he is devoid of right conduct. He who performs the Agnihotra and has controlled his senses is alone said to be a Brahmin.

By this question and answer it is clearly laid down that right conduct alone constitutes Brahminhood and everything else is of no consequence so far as this is concerned. The respect which a Brahmin commands can only be on account of his conduct in life. What is right conduct is also pointed out by Dharmaputra. It is control of the senses and daily performance of Agnihotra enjoined as a nityakarma by the Vedas. Performance of Agnihotra every day purifies a man's mind and enriches his spirituality.

It is said that an Agnihotri never tells a falsehood and he is full of kindness and never entertains in thought, word or deed harm to anybody.

31

The next questions of the Yaksha are as follows:

प्रियचचनवादी किं लभते विमृशितकार्यकरः किं लभते ।  
बहुभिन्नकरः किं लभते धर्मो रतः किं लभते कथय ॥

71



*Tell me what does one gain who speaks pleasant words?*

*What does he gain that acts after due deliberation?*

*What does he get that makes many friends and what does he attain who is devoted to Dharma?*

Dharmaputra replies thus:

प्रियवचनवादी प्रियो भवति विमुक्तिकार्यकरोऽधिकं जयति ।

बहुमित्रकरः सुखं वसते यच्च धर्मरतः स गतिं लभते ॥

*He who uses pleasant words is liked by all.*

*He who acts with due deliberation succeeds very much.*

*He who has many friends lives happily.*

*He who is devoted to Dharma attains the liberation.*

32

Yaksha then asked:

को मोदते किमाश्चर्यं कः पन्थाः का च वार्तिका ।

वद मे चतुरः प्रश्नान् मृता जीवन्तु बान्धवाः॥

*Who is joyous?*

*What is the wonder?*

*What is the way and what is the news?*

*Answer these four questions. May your dead relatives come to life.*

Dharmaputra replies:

पञ्चमेऽहनि षष्ठे वा शाकं पचति स्वे गृहे ।

अनृणी चाप्रवासी च स वारिचर मोदते ॥

अहन्यहनि भूतानि गच्छन्तीह यमालयम् ।

शेषाः स्थावरमिच्छन्ति किमाश्चर्यमतः परम् ॥

72

तर्कोऽप्रतिष्ठः श्रुतयो विभिन्ना  
नैको ऋषिर्यस्य मतं प्रमाणम् ।  
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां  
महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ॥  
अस्मि न्महामोहमये कटाहे  
सूर्याग्निना रात्रिदिवेन्धनेन ।  
मासर्तुर्द्वीपरिघट्टनेन  
भूतानि कालः पचतीति वार्ता ॥

*O! Spirit living in the water! The man who cooks vegetables in his own house on the fifth or sixth part of the day, but who is not in need and who never goes out from his house is truly happy.*

*Day after day beings are entering the abode of Yama, yet those that remain believe that they will live for ever. What can be more wonderful than this?*

*Ligic is uncertain. The Srutis are contradictory. There is not one Rishi whose opinion is authoritative. Truth about Dharma is hidden. That alone is the path which great men tread. In the frying pan of this illusory world time is cooking the beings in the fire of the Sun with fuel of days and nights and with the ladle constituted by months and seasons. This is news.*

*It is within our experience that a person who is courteous and speaks always pleasantly and moves with people as a true gentleman, is liked by all and becomes very popular. This popularity will be a source of strength to him. The great Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar who, in his immortal Kural, has devoted a separate chapter on 'Iniyavai koorai' or 'speaking sweet words', says, among other things, (Chapter 10, Verse 98)—“Sweet and inoffensive words yield happiness both here and*

73

hereafter, and also sweetly uttered words that do good to others will light up the path of virtue."

So much importance is attached to the pleasant speech that the great sage Manu, when laying down that a person should speak truth declares, 'The truth should be spoken pleasantly and the unpleasant truth should not be uttered. सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम् ॥

It is also our experience in life that a person who does a work after thought and deliberation, achieves success. Planned work after mature consideration always yields sure results. Otherwise, it will be a mere drift.

A man's friends are his most valuable treasure in life. A man is happy in his friends. It is said to be "divinely bestowed on man." It is friendship that makes a man's path easy in life.

He who is ever intent on Dharma attains the goal of everlasting bliss. Nothing comes to his aid in his life after death as the Dharma he has pursued. Hence it is that Manu says

‘धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः’

"He who protects Dharma is in turn protected by Dharma." When Rama was about to leave for the forest, his mother, Kausalya blesses him in these words:

यं पालयसि धर्मं त्वं धृत्या च नियमेन च ।  
स वै राघवशार्दूल धर्मस्त्वां अभिरक्षतु ॥

"Let that Dharma which you carefully guard with courage and discipline protect you." The great Tamil saint Sivavakyar has sung beautifully in a stanza as follows—'It is charity that you have given voluntarily

and the Dharma that you performed with delight that will protect you like a spirited and fast horse. But even a vast army of infantry, cavalry and elephants will not aid you in the least in the great battle between life and death.'

In answer to the question, 'Who is happy?' Dharmaputra says that the person who is not involved in debt and who is not forced to travel abroad for the sake of his living will be a happy person. This is quite true and will be endorsed by every one's experience.

One other thing that Dharmaputra mentioned is about cooking vegetables and taking them with food. The words used are:

पञ्चमेऽह्नि षष्ठे वा शाकं पचति यो गृहे ।

The literal translation is "he who cooks vegetables on the fifth or sixth part of the day." This is the English translation also given by Pratap Chander Ray in his translation of the Vana-Parva. But the better translation seems to be "He who cooks vegetables on the fifth or sixth day." The Sanskrit original is capable of that translation also. The books in Ayurveda have laid down that excessive consumption of vegetables produces diseases. A sloka in the *Ashtangahridaya* is as follows:

भोजनं तृणकेशावि जुष्टमुष्णीकृतं पुनः ।  
शाकावरान्न भूयिष्ठमत्युष्णं लघुणं त्यजेत् ॥

"One should not eat too much vegetables lest he should suffer from diseases." Probably having these rules of health in mind Dharmaputra says that a person who cooks vegetables only on fifth or sixth day, will avoid taking too much vegetables and therefore will be healthy and cheerful.



When the Yaksha asked 'what is the wonder?' Dharmaputra very appropriately and truly gives a wonderful reply: 'When man is witnessing the passing away of everyone around him, still he thinks and acts as if he will endure for ever.' The hard fact that life is only a phase he forgets easily. This is inexplicable except on the hypothesis of the working of Maya or Avidya. It is by the subjection to Maya that man identifies himself with the things of the world and attributes permanency to the unreal and everchanging. It is the mysterious working of Maya that is referred to as a wonder here. When the Yaksha asked 'What is the way?' Dharmaputra naturally referred to the difficulty of knowing the true path.

Scripture is not able to help us as it speaks in many voices. Seers also differ. Our own reasoning also is unable to help us to come to a conclusion. Under the circumstances, says Dharmaputra, the path actually trodden by great men is the surest guide to us for our life.

'Lives of great men, all remind us.

We can make our lives sublime.'

The great Sankarabhagavatpada in his *Vivekachoodamani* expresses the same idea when he says 'I shall show the path which the Yatis took for reaching the other side of *samsara*.' He does not want the reader to rely on his own words at all; but, he only wants to show the example of great men who attained the goal.

When the Yaksha asks the question 'What is the news?' it is difficult to guess what the answer may be. But, Dharmaputra very wisely refers to the most pro-

found truth of nature namely that Time destroys everything and that all beings in the world are the victims of the ravages of Time.

The last question of the Yaksha is as follows:

व्याख्याता मे त्वया प्रश्ना याथातथ्यं परन्तप।

पुरुषं त्विदानीं व्याख्याहि यश्च सर्वधनी नरः॥

"You have truly commented on all the questions. Please answer now—'Who is the person that is possessed of all wealth?'"

Dharmaputra answered thus—

दिवं स्पृशति भूमिं च शब्दः पुण्येन कर्मणा ।

यावत्सशब्दो भवति तावत्पुरुष उच्यते ॥

तुल्ये प्रियाप्रिये यस्य सुखदुःखे तथैव च ।

अतीतानागते चोभे स वै सर्वधनी नरः ॥

'As long as one's fame touches heaven and earth by his good deed one will be called a man. He to whom the things likable and not likable, or sorrow and happiness, or the past and the future are the same, he is possessed of all wealth.'

By सर्वधनी is meant the person who is so absolutely rich that he has no wants. Richness consists according to Dharmaputra in the contented mind devoid of attachment or desire. A person who cultivates tranquillity of mind and poise is neither afflicted by sorrow nor elated by joy. He never shrinks from anything disagreeable to him, nor does he go after things which he likes. He is never worried about what has happened in the past nor does he pine for what he may not get.

Sita, undergoing suffering and sorrow at Lanka in her separation from Rama, utters the following pregnant words:

धन्याः खलु महात्मानः मूनयः सत्यसंमताः ।  
जितात्मनो महाभागाः येषां न स्तः प्रियाप्रिये ॥

'Those sages are fortunate to whom *priya* and *apriya* are the same.' She gives a true reason for this.

प्रियास्तु संभवेद्दुःखमप्रियान्नाधिकं भयम्

'Attachment gives rise to sorrow and dislike gives rise to fear.' Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises the same truth in the following words:

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ।  
तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरः तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥

"He to whom, likes and dislikes are the same, to whom sorrow and happiness are alike, who treats clods of earth, stone and gold alike and who is unaffected by either censure or fulsome praise and who is ever in possession of tranquillity,' that person of wisdom is called *गुणातीत*. It is the three *gunas*, namely, Satva, Rajas and Tamas in man's nature that make him like and dislike, affected by censure or praise or afflicted by sorrows or attracted by joys.

When one gets above the operation of the *gunas*, then he is described as *gunaateeta* and it is this *gunaateeta* referred to by Dharmaputra that makes a *Sarvadhane*.

With this last question about the *Sarvadhane Nara*, the series of questions put by the Yaksha comes to an end. As already mentioned in the beginning, the

Yaksha was pleased and revealed himself to Dharmaputra as his father Dharma. Though the *Yaksha Prasna* consists of a series of separate questions and answers given to each of them by Dharmaputra, there is a continuity in the central teaching which Vyasa had in view when he wrote this part of the *Mahabharata* containing the *Yaksha Prasna*. It is that the Veda is the fundamental *pramana* or authority for our *Dharma*. Hence to the first question, namely, 'what is it that makes the Sun rise,' Dharmaputra readily answered: "Brahma it is that makes the Sun rise." The word Brahma means the Veda. Neelakanta, the commentator, is of opinion that this series of questions and answers which he calls *Prasnottaramalika* or garland of questions and answers explains the true nature of the Atman. It says that by *Aditya* mentioned in the first question is meant the *Jiva*. The true nature of the *Jiva* as distinct from the body which encases it is clearly revealed to us by the Veda. To attain this knowledge of the Atman, the various *Dharmas* which form the disciplines necessary to be observed are clearly taught in the *Yaksha Prasna*. It is by the observance of these *Dharmas* that are enjoined by the Veda, in a spirit of detachment, selflessness and of *ahimsa*, that the *Jiva* will attain the state of *Jivanmukti*, by which is meant the liberation of the soul even during the life in this world, by the realisation of its true nature, namely, its identity with the *Paramatman*. The person who leads his life with detachment unaffected by sorrow or joy, by likes and dislikes is described in the last answer by Dharmaputra, as the *Sarvadhane Nara* or the person who is possessed of all wealth. It is this same person who is described in



the Bhagavad Gita as a *Sthitaprajna* and again later as the *Bhakta* and finally as the *Trigunaateeta* by the Lord.

The goal of man's life, according to the *Yaksha Prasna* is the attainment of the state of a *Sarvadhanee* or *Jivanmukta*. Such a *Jivanmukta* will be the most efficacious instrument for the good of mankind. He is not a person who is concerned only about his own salvation. But he is deeply interested in the spiritual welfare and the happiness of mankind. That is why the Gita says that even a realised soul should act for the purpose of *lokasangraha*.

But the difference between his actions and those of others is that his actions are inspired by the renunciation of all motives and desires and by self-abnegation. This is beautifully emphasised in the account given of the conversation between Sri Sankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetam and Vinoba Bhave reproduced in the *Bhavan's Journal* dated Sept. 17, 1961 under the caption 'The Meaning of Service'. The Acharya said that every man should engage himself in rendering service to others. But the effect of that service is not to be thought of as the welfare of others, but it must lead to the purification of oneself.

A careful and intelligent reading of the *Yaksha-Prasna* will be of immense benefit to every *aastika* who earnestly longs for knowledge and spirituality.